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AURORA LEIGH,

AND OTHER POEMS.

BY

ELIZABETH BARRETT BROWNING.

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ROBERT BROWNING.

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DEDICATION.

TO MY FATHER.

WHEN your eyes fall upon this page of dedication, and you start to see to whom it is inscribed, your first thought will be of the time far off when I was a child and wrote verses, and when I dedicated them to you, who were my public and my critic. Of all that such a recollection implies of saddest and sweetest to both of us, it would become neither of us to speak before the world : nor would it be possible for us to speak of it to one another, with voices that did not falter. Enough, that what is in my heart when I write thus, will be fully known to yours.

And my desire is that *you*, who are a witness how if this art of poetry had been a less earnest object to me, it must have fallen from exhausted hands before this day,—that *you*, who have shared with me in things bitter and sweet, softening or enhancing them every day—that *you*, who hold with me over all sense of loss and transiency, one hope by one Name,—may accept the inscription of these volumes, the exponents of a few years of an existence which has been sustained and comforted by you as well as given. Somewhat more faint-hearted than I used to be, it is my fancy thus to seem to return to a visible personal dependence on you, as if indeed I were a child again ; to conjure your beloved image between myself and the public, so as to be sure of one smile,—and to satisfy my heart while I sanctify my ambition, by associating with the great pursuit of my life, its tenderest and holiest affection.

Your

E. B. B.

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AURORA LEIGH.

FIRST BOOK.

OF writing many books there is no end ;
And I have written much in prose and
verse

For others' uses, will write now for
mine,—

Will write my story for my better self,
As when you paint your portrait for a
friend,

Who keeps it in a drawer and looks at it
Long after he has ceased to love you,
just

To hold together what he was and is.

I, writing thus, am still what men call
young ;

I have not so far left the coasts of life
To travel inland, that I cannot hear
That murmur of the outer Infinite
Which unweaned babies smile at in their
sleep

When wondered at for smiling ; not so
far,

But still I catch my mother at her post
Beside the nursery-door, with finger up,
'Hush, hush—here's too much noise !'
while her sweet eyes

Leap forward, taking part against her
word

In the child's riot. Still I sit and feel
My father's slow hand, when she had
left us both,

Stroke out my childish curls across his
knee ;

And hear Assunta's daily jest (she knew
He liked it better than a better jest)

Inquire how many golden scudi went
To make such ringlets. O my father's
hand,

Stroke heavily, heavily the poor hair
down,

Draw, press the child's head closer to thy
knee !

I'm still too young, too young, to sit
alone.

I write. My mother was a Florentine,
Whose rare blue eyes were shut from
seeing me

When scarcely I was four years old ; my
life

A poor spark snatched up from a failing
lamp

Which went out therefore. She was
weak and frail ;

She could not bear the joy of giving
life—

The mother's rapture slew her. If her
kiss

Had left a longer weight upon my lips,
It might have steadied the uneasy breath,

And reconciled and fraternised my soul
With the new order. As it was, indeed,

I felt a mother-want about the world,
And still went seeking, like a bleating
lamb

Left out at night in shutting up the
fold,—

As restless as a nest-deserted bird
Grown chill through something being
away, though what

It knows not. I, Aurora Leigh, was
born

To make my father sadder, and myself
Not overjoyous, truly. Women know

The way to rear up children, (to be just,)
They know a simple, merry, tender
knack

Of tying sashes, fitting baby-shoes,
And stringing pretty words that make
no sense,

And kissing full sense into empty words ;
Which things are corals to cut life upon,

Although such trifles : children learn by
such,

Love's holy earnest in a pretty play,
And get not over-early solemnised,

But seeing, as in a rose-bush, Love's
Divine,

Which burns and hurts not,—not a single
bloom,—

Become aware and unafraid of Love.
Such good do mothers. Fathers love as well

—Mine did, I know,—but still with heavier brains,
And wills more consciously responsible,
And not as wisely, since less foolishly;
So mothers have God's license to be missed.

My father was an austere Englishman,
Who, after a dry life-time spent at home
In college-learning, law, and parish talk,
Was flooded with a passion unaware,
His whole provisioned and complacent past

Drowned out from him that moment.
As he stood

In Florence, where he had come to spend a month

And note the secret of Da Vinci's drains,

He musing somewhat absently perhaps
Some English question . . whether men should pay

The unpopular but necessary tax
With left or right hand—in the alien sun

In that great square of the Santissima,
There drifted past him (scarcely marked enough

To move his comfortable island-scorn,) A train of priestly banners, cross and psalm,

The white-veiled rose-crowned maidens holding up

Tall tapers, weighty for such wrists, aslant

To the blue luminous tremor of the air,
And letting drop the white wax as they went

To eat the bishop's wafer at the church;
From which long trail of chanting priests and girls

A face flashed like a cymbal on his face,
And shook with silent clangour brain and heart,

Transfiguring him to music. Thus, even thus,

He too received his sacramental gift
With eucharistic meanings; for he loved.

And thus beloved, she died. I've heard it said

That but to see him in the first surprise
Of widower and father, nursing me,
Unmothered little child of four years old,

His large man's hands afraid to touch my curls,

As if the gold would tarnish,—his grave lips

Contriving such a miserable smile,
As if he knew needs must, or I should die,

And yet 'twas hard,—would almost make the stones

Cry out for pity. There's a verse he set
In Santa Croce to her memory,

'Weep for an infant too young to weep much

When death removed this mother'—stops the mirth

To-day on women's faces when they walk

With rosy children hanging on their gowns,

Under the cloister to escape the sun
That scorches in the piazza. After which

He left our Florence and made haste to hide

Himself, his prattling child, and silent grief,

Among the mountains above Pelago;
Because unmothered babes, he thought,

had need

Of mother nature more than others use,
And Pan's white goats, with udders warm and full

Of mystic contemplations, come to feed
Poor milkless lips of orphans like his

own—

Such scholar-scrap he talked, I've heard from friends,

For even prosaic men, who wear grief long,

Will get to wear it as a hat aside
With a flower stuck in't. Father, then,

and child,

We lived among the mountains many years,

God's silence on the outside of the house,
And we, who did not speak too loud within;

And old Assunta to make up the fire,
Crossing herself whene'er a sudden flame

Which lightened from the firewood, made alive

That picture of my mother on the wall.
 The painter drew it after she was dead ;
 And when the face was finished, throat
 and hands,
 Her cameriera carried him, in hate
 Of the English-fashioned shroud, the
 last brocade
 She dressed in at the Pitti. ' He should
 paint
 No sadder thing than that,' she swore,
 ' to wrong
 Her poor signora.' Therefore very
 strange
 The effect was. I, a little child, would
 crouch
 For hours upon the floor with knees
 drawn up,
 And gaze across them, half in terror,
 half
 In adoration, at the picture there,—
 That swan-like supernatural white life,
 Just sailing upward from the red stiff
 silk
 Which seemed to have no part in it, nor
 power
 To keep it from quite breaking out of
 bounds :
 For hours I sate and stared. Assunta's
 awe
 And my poor father's melancholy eyes
 Still pointed that way. That way, went
 my thoughts
 When wandering beyond sight. And as
 I grew
 In years, I mixed, confused, uncon-
 sciously,
 Whatever I last read or heard or dreamed
 Abhorrent, admirable, beautiful,
 Pathetical, or ghastly, or grotesque,
 With still that face . . . which did not
 therefore change,
 But kept the mystic level of all forms
 And fears and admirations, was by turns
 Ghost, fiend, and angel, fairy, witch, and
 sprite,
 A dauntless Muse who eyes a dreadful
 Fate,
 A loving Psyche who loses sight of Love,
 A still Medusa, with mild milky brows
 All curdled and all clothed upon with
 snakes
 Whose slime falls fast as sweat will ; or,
 anon,
 Our Lady of the Passion, stabbed with
 swords

Where the Babe sucked ; or, Lamia in
 her first
 Moonlighted pallor, ere she shrunk and
 blinked,
 And, shuddering, wriggled down to the
 unclean ;
 Or, my own mother, leaving her last
 smile
 In her last kiss, upon the baby-mouth
 My father pushed down on the bed for
 that,—
 Or my dead mother, without smile or
 kiss,
 Buried at Florence. All which images,
 Concentred on the picture, glassed them-
 selves
 Before my meditative childhood, . . as
 The incoherencies of change and death
 Are represented fully, mixed and merg-
 ed,
 In the smooth fair mystery of perpetual
 Life.

And while I stared away my childish
 wits
 Upon my mother's picture, (ah, poor
 child !)
 My father, who through love had sud-
 denly
 Thrown off the old conventions, broken
 loose
 From chin-bands of the soul, like Laza-
 rus,
 Yet had no time to learn to talk and
 walk
 Or grow anew familiar with the sun,—
 Who had reached to freedom, not to
 action, lived,
 But lived as one entranced, with
 thoughts, not aims,—
 Whom love had unmade from a common
 man
 But not completed to an uncommon
 man,—
 My father taught me what he had learnt
 the best
 Before he died and left me,—grief and
 love.
 And, seeing we had books among the
 hills,
 Strong words of counselling souls con-
 federate
 With vocal pines and waters,—out of
 books
 He taught me all the ignorance of men,

And how God laughs in heaven when
 any man
 Says 'Here I'm learned; this, I under-
 stand;
 In that, I am never caught at fault or
 doubt.'
 He sent the schools to school, demon-
 strating
 A fool will pass for such through one
 mistake,
 While a philosopher will pass for such,
 Through said mistakes being ventured
 in the gross
 And heaped up to a system.

I am like,
 They tell me, my dear father. Broader
 brows
 Howbeit, upon a slenderer undergrowth
 Of delicate features,—paler, near as
 grave;
 But then my mother's smile breaks up
 the whole,
 And makes it better sometimes than
 itself.

So, nine full years, our days were hid
 with God
 Among his mountains. I was just thir-
 teen,
 Still growing like the plants from unseen
 roots
 In tongue-tied Springs,—and suddenly
 awoke
 To full life and life's needs and agonies,
 With an intense, strong, struggling
 heart beside
 A stone-dead father. Life, struck sharp
 on death,
 Makes awful lightning. His last word
 was, 'Love—'
 'Love, my child, love, love!'—(then he
 had done with grief)
 'Love, my child.' Ere I answered he
 was gone,
 And none was left to love in all the
 world.

There, ended childhood: what suc-
 ceeded next
 I recollect as, after fevers, men
 Thread back the passage of delirium,
 Missing the turn still, baffled by the
 door;
 Smooth endless days, notched here and
 there with knives;

A weary, wormy darkness, spurred if
 the flank
 With flame, that it should eat and end
 itself
 Like some tormented scorpion. Then,
 at last,
 I do remember clearly, how there came
 A stranger with authority, not right,
 (I thought not) who commanded, caught
 me up
 From old Assunta's neck; how, with a
 shriek,
 She let me go,—while I, with ears too
 full
 Of my father's silence, to shriek back a
 word,
 In all a child's astonishment at grief
 Stared at the wharf-edge where she
 stood and moaned,
 My poor Assunta, where she stood and
 moaned!
 The white walls, the blue hills, my Italy,
 Drawn backward from the shuddering
 steamer-deck,
 Like one in anger drawing back her
 skirts
 Which suppliants catch at. Then the
 bitter sea
 Inexorably pushed between us both,
 And sweeping up the ship with my de-
 spair
 Threw us out as a pasture to the stars.

Ten nights and days we voyaged on the
 deep;
 Ten nights and days without the com-
 mon face
 Of any day or night; the moon and sun
 Cut off from the green reconciling earth,
 To starve, into a blind ferocity
 And glare unnatural; the very sky
 (Dropping its bell-net down upon the sea
 As if no human heart should 'scape
 alive,)
 Bedraggled with the desolating salt,
 Until it seemed no more that holy heaven
 To which my father went. All new, and
 strange—
 The universe turned stranger, for a child.

Then, land!—then, England! oh, the
 frosty cliffs
 Looked cold upon me. Could I find a
 home

Among those mean red houses through
 the fog?
 And when I heard my father's language
 first
 From alien lips which had no kiss for
 mine,
 I wept aloud, then laughed, then wept,
 then wept,
 And some one near me said the child was
 mad
 'Through much sea-sickness. The train
 swept us on.
 Was this my father's England? the great
 isle?
 'The ground seemed cut up from the fel-
 lowship
 Of verdure, from field, as man from
 man;
 The skies themselves looked low and
 positive,
 As almost you could touch them with a
 hand,
 And dared to do it they were so far off
 From God's celestial crystals; all things
 blurred
 And dull and vague. Did Shakespeare
 and his mates
 Absorb the light here?—not a hill or
 stone
 With heart to strike a radiant colour up
 Or active outline on the indifferent air!

I think I see my father's sister stand
 Upon the hall-step of her country-house
 To give me welcome. She stood straight
 and calm,
 Her somewhat narrow forehead braided
 tight
 As if for taming accidental thoughts
 From possible pulses; brown hair prick-
 ed with gray
 By frigid use of life, (she was not old
 Although my father's elder by a year)
 A nose drawn sharply, yet in delicate
 lines;
 A close mild mouth, a little soured about
 The ends, through speaking unrequited
 loves,
 Or peradventure niggardly half-truths;
 Eyes of no color,—once they might have
 smiled,
 But never, never have forgot themselves
 In smiling; cheeks in which was yet a
 rose {book,
 Of perished summers, like a rose in a

Kept more for ruth than pleasure,—if
 past bloom,
 Past fading also.

She had lived, we'll say,
 A harmless life, she called a virtuous life,
 A quiet life, which was not life at all,
 (But that, she had not lived enough to
 know)
 Between the vicar and the county squires,
 The lord-lieutenant looking down some-
 times
 From the empyrean to assure their souls
 Against chance vulgarisms, and, in the
 abyss,
 The apothecary looked on once a year,
 To prove their soundness of humility.
 The poor-club exercised her Christian
 gifts
 Of knitting stockings, stitching petti-
 coats,
 Because we are of one flesh after all
 And need one flannel, (with a proper
 sense
 Of difference in the quality)—and still
 The book-club, guarded from your mod-
 ern trick
 Of shaking dangerous questions from
 the crease,
 Preserved her intellectual. She had
 lived
 A sort of cage-bird life, born in a cage,
 Accounting that to leap from perch to
 perch
 Was act and joy enough for any bird.
 Dear heaven, how silly are the things
 that live
 In thickets, and eat berries!
 I, alas,
 A wild bird scarcely fledged, was brought
 to her cage,
 And she was there to meet me. Very
 kind.
 Bring the clean water; give out the fresh
 seed.
 She stood upon the steps to welcome
 me,
 Calm, in black garb. I clung about her
 neck,—
 Young babes, who catch at every shred
 of wool
 To draw the new light closer, catch and
 cling
 Less blindly. In my ears, my father's
 word

Hummed ignorantly, as the sea in shells,
 'Love, love, my child.' She, black
 there with my grief,
 Might feel my love—she was his sister
 once—

I clung to her. A moment she seemed
 moved,

Kissed me with cold lips, suffered me to
 cling,

And drew me feebly through the hall into
 The room she sat in.

There, with some strange spasm
 Of pain and passion, she wrung loose
 my hands

Imperiously, and held me at arm's
 length,

And with two gray-steel naked-bladed
 eyes

Searched through my face,—ay, stabbed
 it through and through,

Through brows and cheeks and chin, as
 if to find

A wicked murderer in my innocent face,
 If not here, there perhaps. Then,
 drawing breath,

She struggled for her ordinary calm,
 And missed it rather,—told me not to
 shrink,

As if she had told me not to lie or
 swear,

'She loved my father and would love me
 too

As long as I deserved it.' Very kind.

I understood her meaning afterward ;
 She thought to find my mother in my
 face,

And questioned it for that. For she,
 my aunt,

Had loved my father truly, as she
 could,

And hated, with the gall of gentle souls,
 My Tuscan mother who had fooled
 away

A wise man from wise courses, a good
 man

From obvious duties, and, depriving her,
 His sister, of the household precedence,

Had wronged his tenants, robbed his
 native land,

And made him mad, alike by life and
 death,

In love and sorrow. She had pored for
 years

What sort of woman could be suitable

To her sort of hate, to entertain it with :
 And so, her very curiosity
 Became hate too, and all the idealism
 She ever used in life, was used for hate,
 'Till hate, so nourished, did exceed at
 last

The love from which it grew, in strength
 and heat,

And wrinkled her smooth conscience
 with a sense

Of disputable virtue (say not, sin)
 When Christian doctrine was enforced
 at church.

And thus my father's sister was to me
 My mother's hater. From that day, she
 did

Her duty to me, (I appreciate it
 In her own word as spoken to herself)

Her duty, in large measure, well-pressed
 out,

But measured always. She was gener-
 ous, bland,

More courteous than was tender, gave
 me still

The first place,—as if fearful that God's
 saints

Would look down suddenly and say,
 'Herein

You missed a point, I think, through
 lack of love.'

Alas, a mother never is afraid
 Of speaking angrily to any child,
 Since love, she knows, is justified of love.

And I, I was a good child on the whole,
 A meek and manageable child. Why
 not ?

I did not live, to have the faults of life :
 'There seemed more true life in my fath-
 er's grave

Than in all England. Since *that* threw
 me off

Who fain would cleave, (his latest will,
 they say,

Consigned me to his land) I only thought
 Of lying quiet there where I was thrown
 Like sea-weed on the rocks, and suffer-
 ing her

To prick me to a pattern with her pin,
 Fibre from fibre, delicate leaf from leaf,
 And dry out from my drowned anatomy
 The last sea-salt left in me.

So it was.

I broke the copious curls upon my head

In braids, because she liked smooth-ordered hair.

I left off saying my sweet Tuscan words
Which still at any stirring of the heart
Came up to float across the English
phrase,

As lilies, (*Bene . . or che che*) because
She liked my father's child to speak his
tongue.

I learnt the collects and the catechism,
The creeds, from Athanasius back to
Nice,

The Articles . . the Tracts *against* the
times,

(By no means Buonaventure's 'Prick of
Love,')

And various popular synopses of
Inhuman doctrines never taught by John,
Because she liked instructed piety.

I learnt my complement of classic French
(Kept pure of Balzac and neologism.)

And German also, since she liked a range
Of liberal education,—tongues, not
books.

I learnt a little algebra, a little
Of the mathematics,—brushed with ex-
treme flounce

The circle of the sciences, because
She disliked women who are frivolous.

I learnt the royal genealogies
Of Oviedo, the internal laws

Of the Burmese empire, . . by how
many feet

Mount Chimborazo outsoars Teneriffe,
What navigable river joins itself

To Lara, and what census of the year
five

Was taken at Klagenfurt,—because she
liked

A general insight into useful facts.
I learnt much music,—such as would
have been

As quite impossible in Johnson's day
As still it might be wished—fine sleights
of hand

And unimagined fingering, shuffling off
The hearer's soul through hurricanes of
notes [tunes

To a noisy Pophet; and I drew . . cos-
From French engravings, nereids neatly
draped,

With smirks of simmering godship,—I
washed in

Landscapes from nature (rather say,
washed out.)

I danced the polka and Cellarius,
Spun glass, stuffed birds, and modelled
flowers in wax,

Because she liked accomplishments in
girls.

I read a score of books on womanhood
To prove, if women do not think at all,
They may teach thinking, (to a maiden-
aunt

Or else the author)—books that boldly
assert

Their right of comprehending husband's
talk

When not too deep, and even of answer-
ing

With pretty 'may it please you,' or 'so
it is,'—

Their rapid insight and fine aptitude,
Particular worth and general missionari-
ness,

As long as they keep quiet by the fire
And never say 'no' when the world say
'ay,'

For that is fatal,—their angelic reach
Of virtue, chiefly used to sit and darn,

And fatten household sinners,—their, in
brief,

Potential faculty in everything
Of abdicating power in it: she owned

She liked a woman to be womanly,
And English women, she thanked God
and sighed,

(Some people always sigh in thanking
God)

Were models to the universe. And last
I learnt cross-stitch, because she did not
like

To see me wear the night with empty
hands,

A-doing nothing. So, my shepherdess
Was something after all, (the pastoral
saints

Be praised for't) leaning lovelorn with
pink eyes

To match her shoes, when I mistook the
silks;

Her head uncrushed by that round weight
of hat

So strangely similar to the tortoise-shell
Which slew the tragic poet.

By the way,
The works of women are symbolical.

We sew, sew, prick our fingers, dull our
sight,

Producing what? A pair of slippers,
 sir,
 To put on when you're weary—or a
 stool
 To tumble over and vex you . . 'curse
 that stool!'
 Or else at best, a cushion, where you
 lean
 And sleep, and dream of something we
 are not,
 But would be for your sake. Alas, alas!
 This hurts most, this . . that, after all,
 we are paid
 The worth of our work, perhaps.

In looking down

Those years of education, (to return)
 I wonder if Brinvilliers suffered more
 In the water torture, . . flood succeed-
 ing flood
 To drench the incapable throat and split
 the veins . .
 Than I did. Certain of your feebler
 souls
 Go out in such a process; many pine
 To a sick, inodorous light; my own en-
 dured:
 I had relations in the Unseen, and drew
 The elemental nutriment and heat
 From nature, as earth feels the sun at
 nights,
 Or as a babe sucks surely in the dark,
 I kept the life thrust on me, on the out-
 side
 Of the inner life with all its ample room
 For heart and lungs, for will and intel-
 lect,
 Inviolable by conventions. God,
 I thank thee for that grace of thine!

At first,

I felt no life which was not patience,—
 did
 The thing she bade me, without heed to
 a thing
 Beyond it, sate in just the chair she
 placed,
 With back against the window, to ex-
 clude
 The sight of the great lime-tree on the
 lawn,
 Which seemed to have come on purpose
 from the woods
 To bring the house a message,—ay, and
 walked
 Demurely in her carpeted low rooms,

As if I should not, harkening my own
 steps,
 Misdoubt I was alive. I read her books,
 Was civil to her cousin, Romney Leigh,
 Gave ear to her vicar, tea to her visitors,
 And heard them whisper, when I changed
 a cup,
 (I blushed for joy at that)—'The Italian
 child,
 For all her blue eyes and her quiet ways,
 Thrives ill in England; she is paler yet
 Than when we came the last time; she
 will die.'

'Will die.' My cousin, Romney Leigh,
 blushed too,
 With sudden anger, and approaching
 me
 Said low between his teeth—'You're
 wicked now!
 You wish to die and leave the world a-
 dusk
 For others, with your naughty light
 blown out?'
 I looked into his face defyingly.
 He might have known that, being what
 I was,
 'Twas natural to like to get away
 As far as dead folk can; and then indeed
 Some people make no trouble when they
 die.
 He turned and went abruptly, slammed
 the door
 And shut his dog out.

Romney, Romney Leigh.

I have not named my cousin hitherto,
 And yet I used him as a sort of friend;
 My elder by few years, but cold and shy
 And absent . . tender when he thought
 of it,
 Which scarcely was imperative, grave
 betimes,
 As well as early master of Leigh Hall,
 Whereof the nightmare state upon his
 youth
 Repressing all its seasonable delights,
 And agonising with a ghastly sense
 Of universal hideous want and wrong
 To incriminate possession. When he
 came
 From college to the country, very oft
 He crossed the hill on visits to my aunt,
 With gifts of blue grapes from the hot
 houses,

A book in one hand,—mere statistics, (if I chanced to lift the cover) count of all
 The goats whose beards grow sprouting
 down toward hell,
 Against God's separative judgment-hour.
 And she, she almost loved him,—even allowed
 That sometimes he should seem to sigh
 my way;
 It made him easier to be pitiful,
 And sighing was his gift. So, undisturbed
 At whiles she let him shut my music up
 And push my needles down, and lead me out
 To see in that south angle of the house
 The figs grow black as if by a Tuscan
 rock,
 On some light pretext. She would turn
 her head
 At other moments, go to fetch a thing,
 And leave me breath enough to speak
 with him,
 For his sake; it was simple.

Sometimes too
 He would have saved me utterly, it
 seemed,
 He stood and looked so

Once, he stood so near
 He dropped a sudden hand upon my
 head
 Bent down on woman's work, as soft as
 rain—
 But then I rose and shook it off as fire,
 The stranger's touch that took my
 father's place
 Yet dared seem soft.

I used him for a friend
 Before I ever knew him for a friend.
 'Twas better, 'twas worse also, after-
 ward:

We came so close, we saw our differences
 Too intimately. Always Romney Leigh
 Was looking for the worms, I for the
 gods.

A godlike nature his; the gods look
 down,

Incurious of themselves; and certainly
 'Tis well I should remember, how, those
 days,

I was a worm too, and he looked on me.

A little by his act perhaps, yet more
 By something in me, surely not my will,

I did not die. But slowly, as one in
 swoon,
 To whom life creeps back in the form of
 death,
 With a sense of separation, a blind pain
 Of blank obstruction, and a roar i' the
 ears
 Of visionary chariots which retreat
 As earth grows clearer . . slowly, by de-
 grees,
 I woke, rose up . . where was I? in the
 world;
 For uses therefore I must count worth
 while.

I had a little chamber in the house,
 As green as any privet-hedge a bird
 Might choose to build in, though the
 nest itself
 Could show but dead-brown sticks and
 straws; the walls
 Were green, the carpet was pure green,
 the straight
 Small bed was curtained greenly, and
 the folds

Hung green about the window, which
 let in
 The out-door world with all its greenery.
 You could not push your head out and
 escape

A dash of dawn-dew from the honey-
 suckle,
 But so you were baptised into the grace
 And privilege of seeing. . .

First, the lime,
 (I had enough, there, of the lime, be
 sure,—

My morning-dream was often hummed
 away

By the bees in it;) past the lime, the
 lawn,

Which, after sweeping broadly round
 the house,

Went trickling through the shrubberies
 in a stream

Of tender turf, and wore and lost itself
 Among the acacias, over which, you saw
 The irregular line of elms by the deep
 lane

Which stopped the grounds and dammed
 the overflow

Of arbutus and laurel. Out of sight
 The lane was; sunk so deep, no foreign
 tramp

Nor drover of wild ponies out of Wales

Could guess if lady's hall or tenant's
 lodge
 Dispensed such odours,—though his
 stick well crooked
 Might reach the lowest trail of blossom-
 ing briar
 Which dipped upon the wall. Behind
 the elms,
 And through their tops, you saw the
 folded hills
 Striped up and down with hedges, (burly
 oaks
 Projecting from the line to show them-
 selves)
 Through which my cousin Romney's
 chimneys smoked
 As still as when a silent mouth in frost
 Breathes—showing where the woodlands
 hid Leigh Hall;
 While, far above, a jut of table-land,
 A promontory without water, stretched,—
 You could not catch it if the days were
 thick,
 Or took it for a cloud; but, otherwise
 The vigorous sun would catch it up at
 eve
 And use it for an anvil till he had filled
 The shelves of heaven with burning
 thunderbolts,
 Protesting against night and darkness:—
 then,
 When all his setting trouble was re-
 solved
 To a trance of passive glory, you might
 see
 In apparition on the golden sky
 (Alas, my Giotto's background!) the
 sheep run
 Along the fine clear outline, small as
 mice
 That run along a witch's scarlet thread.

 Not a grand nature. Not my chestnut-
 woods
 Of Vallombrosa, cleaving by the spurs
 To the precipices. Not my headlong
 leaps
 Of waters, that cry out for joy or fear
 In leaping through the palpitating pines,
 Like a white soul tossed out to eternity
 With thrills of time upon it. Not in-
 deed
 My multitudinous mountains, sitting in
 The magic circle, with the mutual touch

Electric, panting from their full deep
 hearts
 Beneath the influent heavens, and wait-
 ing for
 Communion and commission. Italy
 Is one thing, England one.
 On English ground
 You understand the letter . . ere the
 fall
 How Adam lived in a garden. All the
 fields
 Are tied up fast with hedges, nosegay-
 like;
 The hills are crumpled plains,—the plains
 parterres,
 The trees, round, woolly, ready to be
 clipped;
 And if you seek for any wilderness
 You find, at best, a park. A nature
 tamed
 And grown domestic like a barn-door
 fowl,
 Which does not awe you with its claws
 and beak,
 Nor tempt you to an eyrie too high up,
 But which, in cackling, sets you think-
 ing of
 Your eggs to-morrow at breakfast, in the
 pause
 Of finer meditation.
 Rather say,
 A sweet familiar nature, stealing in
 As a dog might, or child, to touch your
 hand
 Or pluck your gown, and humbly mind
 you so
 Of presence and affection, excellent
 For inner uses, from the things without.

 I could not be unthankful, I who was
 Entreated thus and holpen. In the room
 I speak of, ere the house was well awake,
 And also after it was well asleep,
 I sat alone, and drew the blessing in
 Of all that nature. With a gradual step,
 A stir among the leaves, a breath, a ray,
 It came in softly, while the angels made
 A place for it beside me. The moon
 came,
 And swept my chamber clean of foolish
 thoughts.
 The sun came, saying, ' Shall I lift this
 light
 Against the lime-tree, and you will not
 look?

I make the birds sing—listen! . . . but,
for you,
God never hears your voice, excepting
when
You lie upon the bed at nights and
weep.

Then, something moved me. Then, I
wakened up

More slowly than I verily write now,
But wholly, at last, I wakened, opened
wide

The window and my soul, and let the
airs

And out-door sights sweep gradual gos-
pels in,

Regenerating what I was. O life,
How oft we throw it off and think,—

‘Enough,
Enough of life in so much!—here’s a
cause

For rupture;—herein we must break
with Life,

Or be ourselves unworthy; here we are
wronged,

Maimed, spoiled for aspiration: farewell
Life!

—And so, as froward babes, we hide
our eyes

And think all ended.—Then, Life calls
to us

In some transformed, apocalyptic voice,
Above us, or below us, or around:

Perhaps we name it Nature’s voice, or
Love’s,

Tricking ourselves, because we are more
ashamed

To own our compensations than our
griefs:

Still, Life’s voice!—still, we make our
peace with Life.

And I, so young then, was not sullen.
Soon

I used to get up early, just to sit
And watch the morning quicken in the

gray,
And hear the silence open like a flower,
Leaf after leaf,—and stroke with listless

hand
The woodbine through the window, till
at last

I came to do it with a sort of love,
At foolish unaware: whereat I smiled,—

A melancholy smile, to catch myself

Smiling for joy.

Capacity for joy
Admits temptation. It seemed, next,
worth while

To dodge the sharp sword set against my
life;

To slip down stairs through all the sleepy
house,

As mute as any dream there, and escape
As a soul from the body, out of doors,

Glide through the shrubberies, drop into
the lane,

And wander on the hills an hour or two,
Then back again before the house should

stir.

Or else I sat on in my chamber green,
And lived my life, and thought my

thoughts, and prayed
My prayers without the vicar; read my

books,
Without considering whether they were
fit

To do me good. Mark, there. We get
no good

By being ungenerous, even to a book,
And calculating profits . . . so much help

By so much reading. It is rather when
We gloriously forget ourselves and

plunge
Soul-forward, headlong, into a book’s

profound,
Impassioned for its beauty and salt of
truth—

’Tis then we get the right good from a
book.

I read much. What my father taught
before

From many a volume, Love re-empha-
sised

Upon the self-same pages: Theophrast
Grew tender with the memory of his

eyes,
And Ælian made mine wet. The trick
of Greek

And Latin, he had taught me, as he
would

Have taught me wrestling or the game
of fives

If such he had known,—most like a ship-
wrecked man

Who heaps his single platter with goats’
cheese

And scarlet berries; or like any man

Who loves but one, and so gives all at once,
 Because he has it, rather than because
 He counts it worthy. Thus, my father gave ;
 And thus, as did the women formerly
 By young Achilles, when they pinned the veil
 Across the boy's audacious front, and swept
 With tuneful laughs the silver-fretted rocks.
 He wrapt his little daughter in his large
 Man's doublet, careless did it fit or no.

But, after I had read for memory,
 I read for hope. The path my father's foot
 Had trod me out, which suddenly broke off,
 (What time he dropped the wallet of the flesh
 And passed) alone I carried on, and set
 My child-heart 'gainst the thorny under-wood,
 To reach the grassy shelter of the trees.
 Ah, babe i' the wood, without a brother-babe !
 My own self-pity, like the red-breast bird,
 Flies back to cover all that past with leaves.

Sublimest danger, over which none weeps,
 When any young wayfaring soul goes forth
 Alone, unconscious of the perilous road,
 The day-sun dazzling in his limpid eyes,
 To thrust his own way, he an alien, through
 The world of books ! Ah, you !—you think it fine,
 You clap hands—'A fair day !'—you cheer him on,
 As if the worst, could happen, were to rest
 Too long beside a fountain. Yet, behold,
 Behold !—the world of books is still the world :
 And worldlings in it are less merciful
 And more puissant. For the wicked there

Are winged like angels. Every knife that strikes,
 Is edged from elemental fire to assail
 A spiritual life. The beautiful seems right
 By force of beauty, and the feeble wrong
 Because of weakness. Power is justified,
 Though armed against St. Michael.
 Many a crown
 Covers bald foreheads. In the book-world, true,
 There's no lack, neither, of God's saints and kings,
 That shake the ashes of the grave aside
 From their calm locks, and undiscomfited
 Look steadfast truths against Time's changing mask.
 True, many a prophet teaches in the roads ;
 True, many a seer pulls down the flaming heavens
 Upon his own head in strong martyrdom,
 In order to light men a moment's space.
 But stay !—who judges?—who distinguishes
 'Twixt Saul and Nahash justly, at first sight,
 And leaves king Saul precisely at the sin,
 To serve king David? who discerns at once
 The sound of the trumpets, when the trumpets blow
 For Alaric as well as Charlemagne?
 Who judges wizards, and can tell true seers
 From conjurors? The child, there? Would you leave
 That child to wander in a battle-field
 And push his innocent smile against the guns?
 Or even in a catacomb . . . his torch
 Grown ragged in the fluttering air, and all
 The dark a-mutter round him? not a child.

I read books bad and good—some bad and good
 At once : (good aims not always make good books ;
 Well-tempered spades turn up ill-smelling soils

In digging vineyards, even) books, that
 prove
 God's being so definitely, that man's
 doubt
 Grows self-defined the other side the line,
 Made Atheist by suggestion; moral
 books,
 Exasperating to license; genial books,
 Discounting from the human dignity;
 And merry books, which set you weep-
 ing when
 The sun shines,—ay, and melancholy
 books,
 Which make you laugh that any one
 should weep
 In this disjointed life for one wrong
 more.

The world of books is still the world, I
 write,
 And both worlds have God's providence,
 thank God,
 To keep and hearten: with some strug-
 gle, indeed,
 Among the breakers, some hard swim-
 ming through
 The deeps—I lost breath in my soul
 sometimes,
 And cried, 'God save me if there's any
 God,
 But, even so, God saved me; and being
 dashed
 From error on to error, every turn
 Still brought me nearer to the central
 truth.

I thought so. All this anguish in the
 thick
 Of men's opinions . . . press and coun-
 terpress,
 Now up, now down, now underfoot, and
 now
 Emergent . . . all the best of it, perhaps,
 But throws you back upon a noble trust
 And use of your own instinct,—merely
 proves
 Pure reason stronger than bare infer-
 ence
 At strongest. Try it,—fix against heav-
 en's wall
 Your scaling ladders of school logic—
 mount
 Step by step!—Sight goes faster; that
 still ray

Which strikes out from you, how, you
 cannot tell,
 And why, you know not—(did you elim-
 inate,
 That such as you, indeed, should ana-
 lyse?)
 Goes straight and fast as light, and high
 as God.

The cygnet finds the water; but the
 man
 Is born in ignorance of his element,
 And feels out blind at first, disorganised
 By sin i' the blood,—his spirit-insight
 dulled
 And crossed by his sensations. Pres-
 ently
 He feels it quicken in the dark some-
 times;
 When mark, be reverent, be obedient.—
 For such dumb motions of imperfect life
 Are oracles of vital Deity
 Attesting the Hereafter. Let who says
 'The soul's a clean white paper,' rather
 say,
 A palimpsest, a prophet's holograph
 Defiled, erased and covered by a
 monk's,—
 The apocalypse, by a Longus! poring
 on
 Which obscene text, we may discern
 perhaps
 Some fair, fine trace of what was written
 once,
 Some upstroke of an alpha and omega
 Expressing the old Scripture.

Books, books, books!
 I had found the secret of a garret-room
 Piled high with cases in my father's
 name;
 Piled high, packed large,—where, creep-
 ing in and out
 Among the giant fossils of my past,
 Like some small nimble mouse between
 the ribs
 Of a mastodon, I nibbled here and
 there
 At this or that box, pulling through the
 gap,
 In heats of terror, haste, victorious joy,
 The first book first. And how I felt it
 beat
 Under my pillow, in the morning's dark,

An hour before the sun would let me
read!

My books!

At last, because the time was ripe.
I chanced upon the poets.

As the earth
Plunges in fury, when the internal fires
Have reached and pricked her heart,
and, throwing flat
The marts and temples, the triumphal
gates
And towers of observation, clears her-
self

To elemental freedom—thus, my soul,
At poetry's divine first finger touch,
Let go conventions and sprang up sur-
prised,

Convicted of the great eternities
Before two worlds.

What's this, Aurora Leigh,
You write so of the poets, and not laugh?
Those virtuous liars, dreamers after
dark,

Exaggerators of the sun and moon,
And soothsayers in a tea-cup?

I write so
Of the only truth-tellers, now left to
God,

The only speakers of essential truth,
Opposed to relative, comparative,
And temporal truths; the only holders
by

His sun-skirts, through conventional
grey glooms;

The only teachers who instruct mankind,
From just a shadow on a charnel wall,
'To find man's veritable stature out,
Erect, sublime,—the measure of a man,
And that's the measure of an angel,
says

The apostle. Ay, and while your com-
mon men

Lay telegraphs, gauge railroads, reign,
reap, dine,

And dust the flaunty carpets of the world
For kings to walk on, or our president,
The poet suddenly will catch them up
With his voice like a thunder . . . 'This
is soul,

This is life, this word is being said in
heaven,

Here's God down on us! what are you
about?"

How all those workers start amid their
work,

Look round, look up, and feel, a mo-
ment's space,

That carpet-dusting, though a pretty
trade,

Is not the imperative labour after all.

My own best poets, am I one with you,
That thus I love you,—or but one
through love?

Does all this smell of thyme about my
feet

Conclude my visit to your holy hill
In personal presence, or but testify
The rustling of your vesture through my
dreams

With influent odours? When my joy
and pain,

My thought and aspiration, like the
stops

Of pipe or flute, are absolutely dumb
Unless melodious, do you play on me,
My pipers,—and if, sooth, you did not
blow,

Would no sound come? or is the music
mine,

As a man's voice or breath is called his
own,

Imbreathed by the Life-breather?
'There's a doubt

For cloudy seasons!

But the sun was high
When first I felt my pulses set them-
selves

For concord; when the rhythmic turbu-
lence

Of blood and brain swept outward upon
words,

As wind upon the alders, blanching
them

By turning up their under-natures till
They trembled in dilation. O delight

And triumph of the poet,—who would
say

A man's mere 'yes,' a woman's common
'no,'

A little human hope of that or this,
And says the word so that it burns you
through

With a special revelation, shakes the
heart

Of all the men and women in the world,
As if one came back from the dead and
spoke,

With eyes too happy, a familiar thing

Become divine i' the utterance! while
 for him
 The poet, speaker, he expands with
 joy;
 The palpitating angel in his flesh
 Thrills inly with consenting fellowship
 To those innumerable spirits who sun
 themselves
 Outside of time.

O life, O poetry,
 —Which means life in life! cognisant of
 life
 Beyond this blood-beat,—passionate for
 truth
 Beyond these senses,—poetry, my life,
 My eagle, with both grappling feet still
 hot
 From Zeus's thunder, who has ravished
 me
 Away from all the shepherds, sheep, and
 dogs,
 And set me in the Olympian roar and
 round
 Of luminous faces, for a cup-bearer,
 To keep the mouths of all the godheads
 moist
 For everlasting laughters,—I, myself
 Half drunk across the beaker with their
 eyes!
 How those gods look!

Enough so, Ganymede.
 We shall not bear above a round or
 two—
 We drop the golden cup at Heré's foot
 And swoon back to the earth,—and find
 ourselves
 Face-down among the pine-cones, cold
 with dew,
 While the dogs bark, and many a shep-
 herd scoffs,
 'What's come now to the youth?' Such
 ups and downs
 Have poets.

Am I such indeed? The name
 Is royal, and to sign it like a queen,
 Is what I dare not,—though some royal
 blood
 Would seem to tingle in me now and
 then,
 With sense of power and ache,—with
 imposthumes
 And manias usual to the race. How-
 beit
 I dare not: 'tis too easy to go mad,
 And ape a Bourbon in a crown of straws:

The thing's too common.

Many fervent souls
 Strike rhyme on rhyme, who would strike
 steel on steel
 If steel had offered, in a restless heat
 Of doing something. Many tender souls
 Have strung their losses on a rhyming
 thread,
 As children, cowslips:—the more pains
 they take,
 The work more withers. Young men,
 ay, and maids,
 Too often sow their wild oats in tame
 verse,
 Before they sit down under their own
 vine
 And live for use. Alas, near all the
 birds
 Will sing at dawn,—and yet we do not
 take
 The chaffering swallow for the holy lark.

In those days, though, I never analysed,
 Not even myself. Analysis comes late.
 You catch a sight of Nature, earliest,
 In full front sun-face, and your eyelids
 wink
 And drop before the wonder of 't; you
 miss
 The form, through seeing the light. I
 lived, those days,
 And wrote because I lived—unlicensed
 else:
 My heart beat in my brain. Life's vio-
 lent flood
 Abolished bounds,—and, which my
 neighbour's field,
 Which mine, what mattered? It is thus
 in youth
 We play at leap-frog over the god Term;
 The love within us and the love without
 Are mixed, confounded; if we are loved
 or love,
 We scarce distinguish: thus with other
 power;
 Being acted on and acting seem the
 same:
 In that first onrush of life's chariot-
 wheels,
 We know not if the forests move or we.
 And so, like most young poets, in a
 flush
 Of individual life I poured myself
 Along the veins of others, and achieved

Mere lifeless imitations of live verse,
 And made the living answer for the
 dead,
 Profaning nature. 'Touch not, do not
 taste,
 Nor handle,'—we're too legal, who write
 young :
 We beat the phorminx till we hurt our
 thumbs,
 As if still ignorant of counterpoint ;
 We call the Muse . . 'O Muse, benig-
 nant Muse !'—
 As if we had seen her purple-braided
 head
 With the eyes in it, start between the
 boughs
 As often as a stag's. What make-be-
 lieve,
 With so much earnest ! what effete re-
 sults,
 From virile efforts ! what cold wire-
 drawn odes,
 From such white heats !—bucolics, where
 the cow
 Would scare the writer if they splashed
 the mud
 In lashing off the flies,—didactics, driv-
 en
 Against the heels of what the master
 said ;
 And counterfeiting epics, shrill with
 trumps
 A babe might blow between two strain-
 ing cheeks
 Of bubbled rose, to make his mother
 laugh ;
 And elegiac griefs, and songs of love,
 Like cast-off nosegays picked up on the
 road,
 The worse for being warm : all these
 things, writ
 On happy mornings, with a morning
 heart,
 That leaps for love, is active for re-
 solve,
 Weak for art only. Oft, the ancient
 forms
 Will thrill, indeed, in carrying the young
 blood.
 The wine-skins, now and then, a little
 warped,
 Will crack even, as the new wine gurgles
 in.
 Spare the old bottles !—spill not the new
 wine.

By Keat's soul, the man who never
 stepped
 In gradual progress like another man,
 But, turning grandly on his central self,
 Ensphered himself in twenty perfect
 years,
 And died, not young,—(the life of a long
 life,
 Distilled to a mere drop, falling like a
 tear
 Upon the world's cold cheek to make it
 burn
 For ever ;) by that strong excepted soul,
 I count it strange, and hard to under-
 stand
 That nearly all young poets should write
 old ;
 That Pope was sexagenary at sixteen,
 And beardless Byron academical,
 And so with others. It may be, per-
 haps,
 Such have not settled long and deep
 enough
 In trance, to attain to clairvoyance,—and
 still
 The memory mixes with the vision,
 spoils,
 And works it turbid.

Or perhaps, again
 In order to discover the Muse-Sphinx,
 The melancholy desert must sweep
 round,
 Behind you as before.—

For me, I wrote
 False poems, like the rest, and thought
 them true,
 Because myself was true in writing them.
 I peradventure have writ true ones since
 With less complacence.

But I could not hide
 My quickening inner life from those at
 watch.
 They saw a light at a window now and
 then,
 They had not set there. Who had set it
 there ?

My father's sister started when she
 caught
 My soul agaze in my eyes. She could
 not say
 I had no business with a sort of soul,
 But plainly she objected,—and demurred
 That souls were dangerous things to
 carry straight

Through all the spilt saltpetre of the world.

She said sometimes, 'Aurora, have you done

Your task this morning?—have you read that book?

And are you ready for the crochet here?'—

As if she said, 'I know there's something wrong;

I know I have not ground you down enough

To flatten and bake you to a wholesome crust

For household uses and proprieties, Before the rain has got into my barn

And set the grains a-sprouting. What, you're green

With out-door impudence? you almost grow?'

To which I answered, 'Would she hear my task,

And verify my abstract of the book? Or should I sit down to the crochet work?

Was such her pleasure?' . . Then I sate and teased

The patient needle till it spilt the thread Which oozed off from it in meandering lace

From hour to hour. I was not, therefore, sad;

My soul was singing at a work apart Behind the wall of sense, as safe from harm

As sings the lark when sucked up out of sight,

In vortices of glory and blue air.

And so, through forced work and spontaneous work,

The inner life informed the outer life, Reduced the irregular blood to settled rhythms,

Made cool the forehead with fresh-sprinkling dreams,

And, rounding to the spheric soul the thin

Pined body, struck a colour up the cheeks,

Though somewhat faint. I clenched my brows across

My blue eyes greatening in the looking-glass,

And said, 'We'll live, Aurora! we'll be strong.

The dogs are on us—but we will not die.

Whoever lives true life, will love true love.

I learnt to love that England. Very oft,

Before the day was born, or otherwise Through secret windings of the after-

noons, I threw my hunters off and plunged myself

Among the deep hills, as a hunted stag Will take the waters, shivering with the fear

And passion of the course. And when at last

Escaped,—so many a green slope built on slope

Betwixt me and the enemy's house behind,

I dared to rest, or wander,—in a rest Made sweeter for the step upon the grass,—

And view the ground's most gentle dim-plement,

(As if God's finger touched but did not press

In making England) such an up and down

Of verdure,—nothing too much up or down,

A ripple of land; such little hills, the sky

Can stoop to tenderly and the wheatfields climb;

Such nooks of valleys, lined with orchises,

Fed full of noises by invisible streams;

And open pastures, where you scarcely tell

White daisies from white dew,—at intervals

The mythic oaks and elm-trees standing out

Self-poised upon their prodigy of shade,—I thought my father's land was worthy too

Of being my Shakspeare's.

Very oft alone,

Uncensored; not unfrequently with leave To walk the third with Romney and his friend

The rising painter, Vincent Carrington,

Whom men judge hardly as bee-bon-
neted,
Because he holds that, paint a body
well,
You paint a soul by implication, like
The grand first Master. Pleasant
walks! for if
He said . . . 'When I was last in Ita-
ly' . . .
It sounded as an instrument that's
played
Too far off for the tune—and yet it's
fine
To listen.

After we walked only two,
If cousin Romney pleased to walk with
me.
We read, or talked, or quarrelled, as it
chanced:
We were not lovers, nor even friends
well-matched,
Say rather, scholars upon different
tracks,
And thinkers disagreed; he, overfull
Of what is, and I, haply, overbold
For what might be.

But then the thrushes sang,
And shook my pulses and the elms' new
leaves,—
At which I turned, and held my finger
up,
And bade him mark that, howsoe'er the
world
Went ill, as he related, certainly
The thrushes still sang in it. At the
word
His brow would soften,—and he bore
with me
In melancholy patience, not unkind,
While breaking into voluble ecstasy
I flattered all the beauteous country
round,
All poets use . . . the skies, the clouds,
the fields,
The happy violets hiding from the roads
The primroses run down to, carrying
gold.
The tangled hedgerows, where the cows
push out
Impatient horns and tolerant churning
mouths
'Twixt dripping ash-boughs,—hedgerows
all alive
With birds and gnats and large white
butterflies

Which look as if the May-flower had
caught life
And palpitated forth upon the wind,
Hills, vales, woods, netted in a silver
mist,
Farms, granges, doubled up among the
hills,
And cattle grazing in the watered vales,
And cottage chimneys smoking from the
woods,
And cottage-gardens smelling every-
where,
Confused with smell of orchards. 'See,'
I said,
'And see! is God not with us on the
earth?
And shall we put him down by aught we
do?
Who says there's nothing for the poor
and vile
Save poverty and wickedness? behold!'
And ankle-deep in English grass I leap-
ed,
And clapped my hands, and called all
very fair.

In the beginning when God called all
good,
Even then was evil near us, it is writ.
But we indeed who call things good and
fair,
The evil is upon us while we speak;
Deliver us from evil, let us pray.

SECOND BOOK.

TIMES followed one another. Came a
morn
I stood upon the brink of twenty years,
And looked before and after, as I stood
Woman and artist,—either incomplete,
Both credulous of completion. There I
held
The whole creation in my little cup,
And smiled with thirsty lips before I
drank
'Good health to you and me, sweet
neighbour mine,
And all these peoples.'

I was glad, that day;
The June was in me, with its multitudes
Of nightingales all singing in the dark,
And rosebuds reddening where the calyx
split.

I felt so young, so strong, so sure of
 God!
 So glad, I could not choose be very wise!
 And, old at twenty, was inclined to pull
 My childhood backward in a childish
 jest
 To see the face oft once more, and fare-
 well!
 In which fantastic mood I bounded forth
 At early morning,—would not wait so
 long
 As even to snatch my bonnet by the
 strings,
 But, brushing a green trail across the
 lawn
 With my gown in the dew, took will and
 way
 Among the acacias of the shrubberies,
 To fly my fancies in the open air
 And keep my birthday, till my aunt
 awoke
 To stop good dreams. Meanwhile I
 murmured on
 As honeyed bees keep humming to them-
 selves;
 ‘The worthiest poets have remained un-
 crowned
 Till death has bleached their foreheads to
 the bone,
 And so with me it must be, unless I
 prove
 Unworthy of the grand adversity,
 And certainly I would not fail so much.
 What, therefore, if I crown myself to-day
 In sport, not pride, to learn the feel of it,
 Before my brows be numbed as Dante’s
 own
 To all the tender pricking of such
 leaves?
 Such leaves! what leaves?’
 I pulled the branches down,
 To choose from.
 ‘Not the bay! I choose no bay;
 The fates deny us if we are overbold:
 Nor myrtle—which means chiefly love;
 and love
 Is something awful which one dares not
 touch
 So early o’ mornings. This verben-
 a strains
 The point of passionate fragrance; and
 hard by,
 This guelder rose, at far too slight a beck
 Of the wind, will toss about her flower-
 apples.

Alh—there’s my choice,—that ivy on the
 wall.
 That headlong ivy! not a leaf will grow
 But thinking of a wreath. Large leaves,
 smooth leaves,
 Serrated like my vines, and half as green.
 I like such ivy; bold to leap a height
 ’Twas strong to climb! as good to grow
 on graves
 As twist about a thyrsus; pretty too,
 (And that’s not ill) when twisted round a
 comb.’
 Thus speaking to myself, half singing it,
 Because some thoughts are fashioned
 like a bell
 To ring with once being touched, I drew
 a wreath
 Drenched, blinding me with dew, across
 my brow
 And fastening it behind so, . . turning
 faced
 . . My public!—cousin Romney—with
 a mouth
 Twice graver than his eyes.
 I stood there fixed—
 My arms up, like the caryatid, sole
 Of some abolished temple, helplessly
 Persistent in a gesture which derides
 A former purpose. Yet my blush was
 flame,
 As if from flax, not stone.
 ‘Aurora Leigh,
 ‘The earliest of Aurora’s!’
 Hand stretched out
 I clasped, as shipwrecked men will clasp
 a hand,
 Indifferent to the sort of palm. The
 tide
 Had caught me at my pastime, writing
 down
 My foolish name too near upon the sea
 Which drowned me with a blush as fool-
 ish. ‘You,
 My cousin!’
 The smile died out in his eyes
 And dropped upon his lips, a cold dead
 weight,
 For just a moment . . ‘Here’s a book
 I found!
 No name writ on it—poems, by the
 form;
 Some Greek upon the margin,—lady’s
 Greek,
 Without the accents. Read it? Not a
 word.

I saw at once the thing had witchcraft
in't,
Whereof the reading calls up dangerous
spirits ;
I rather bring it to the witch.'

'My book !

You found it' . . .

'In the hollow by the stream
That beach leans down into—of which
you said
The Oread in it has a Naiad's heart
And pines for waters.'

'Thank you.'

'Thanks to *you*,

My cousin ! that I have seen you not too
much

Witch, scholar, poet, dreamer, and the
rest,
To be a woman also.'

With a glance

The smile rose in his eyes again, and
touched

The ivy on my forehead, light as air.

I answered gravely, 'Poets needs must
be

Or men or women—more's the pity.'

'Ah,

But men, and still less women, happily,
Scarce need be poets. Keep to the
green wreath.

Since even dreaming of the 'stone and
bronze

Brings headaches, pretty cousin, and
defiles

The clean white morning dresses.'

'So you judge !

Because I love the beautiful, I must
Love pleasure chiefly, and be over-
charged

For ease and whiteness. Well—you
know the world,

And only miss your cousin ; 'tis not
much.

But learn this : I would rather take my
part

With God's Dead, who afford to walk in
white

Yet spread his glory, than keep quiet
here,

And gather up my feet from even a
step,

For fear to soil my gown in so much
dust.

I choose to walk at all risks.—Here, if
heads

That hold a rhythmic thought, must act
perforce

For my part I choose headaches,—and
to-day's

My birthday.'

'Dear Aurora, choose instead
To cure them. You have balsams.'

'I perceive
The headache is too noble for my sex.

You think the heartache would sound
decenter,

Since that's the woman's special, proper
ache,

And altogether tolerable, except

To a woman.'

Saying which, I loosed my wreath,
And swinging it beside me as I walked,
Half petulant, half playful, as we walked,
I sent a sidelong look to find his
thought,—

As falcon set on falconer's finger may,
With sidelong head, and startled, braving
eye,

Which means, 'You'll see—you'll see !
I'll soon take flight—

You shall not hinder.' He, as shaking
out

His hand and answering, 'Fly then,' did
not speak,

Except by such a gesture. Silently

We paced, until, just coming into sight
Of the house-windows, he abruptly
caught

At one end of the swinging wreath, and
said,

Aurora ! There I stopped short, breath
and all.

'Aurora, let's be serious, and throw by
This game of head and heart. Life
means, be sure,

Both heart and head,—both active, both
complete,

And both in earnest. Men and women
make

The world, as head and heart make
human life.

Work man, work woman, since there's
work to do

In this beleaguered earth, for head and
heart,

And thought can never do the work of
love :

But work for ends, I mean for uses :
not

For such sleek fringes (do you call them ends?
 Still less God's glory) as we sew ourselves
 Upon the velvet of those baldaquins
 Held 'twixt us and the sun. That book of yours,
 I have not read a page of; but I toss
 A rose up—it falls calyx down, you see!
 'The chances are that, being a woman, young,
 And pure, with such a pair of large, calm eyes,
 You write as well . . . and ill . . . upon the whole,
 As other women. If as well, what then?
 If even a little better, . . . still what then?
 We want the Best in art now, or no art.
 The time is done for facile settings up
 Of minnow gods, nymphs here and tritons there;
 The polytheists have gone out in God,
 That unity of Bests. No best, no God!
 And so with art, we say. Give art's divine,
 Direct, indubitable, real as grief,—
 Or leave us to the grief we grow ourselves
 Divine by overcoming with mere hope
 And most prosaic patience. You, you are young
 As Eve with nature's daybreak on her face;
 But this same world you are come to, dearest coz,
 Has done with keeping birthdays, saves her wreaths
 To hang upon her ruins,—and forgets
 To rhyme the cry with which she still beats back
 Those savage, hungry dogs that hunt her down
 To the empty grave of Christ. The world's hard pressed;
 The sweat of labour in the early curse
 Has (turning acrid in six thousand years)
 Become the sweat of torture. Who has time,
 An hour's time . . . think! . . . to sit upon a bank
 And hear the cymbal tinkle in white hands?
 When Egypt's slain, I say, let Miriam sing!—
 Before . . . where's Moses?'

'Ah—exactly that
 Where's Moses?—is a Moses to be found?
 You'll seek him vainly in the bulrushes,
 While I in vain touch cymbals. Yet concede,
 Such sounding brass has done some actual good
 (The application in a woman's hand,
 If that were credible, being scarcely spoilt,)
 In colonising beehives.'
 'There it is!—
 You play beside a death-bed like a child,
 Yet measure to yourself a prophet's place
 To teach the living. None of all these things,
 Can women understand. You generalise
 Oh, nothing!—not even grief! Your quick-breathed hearts,
 So sympathetic to the personal pang,
 Close on each separate knife-stroke, yielding up
 A whole life at each wound; incapable
 Of deepening, widening a large lap of life
 To hold the world-full woe. The human race
 To you means, such a child, or such a man,
 You saw one morning waiting in the cold,
 Beside that gate, perhaps. You gather up
 A few such cases, and when strong sometimes
 Will write of factories and of slaves, as if
 Your father were a negro, and your son
 A spinner in the mills. All's yours and you,
 All, coloured with your blood, or otherwise
 Just nothing to you. Why, I call you hard
 To general suffering. Here's the world half blind
 With intellectual light, half brutalised
 With civilisation, having caught the plague
 In silks from Tarsus, shrieking east and west
 Along a thousand railroads, mad with pain

And sin too! . . . does one woman of you
all,
(You who weep easily) grow pale to see
This tiger shake his cage?—does one of
you

Stand still from dancing, stop from
stringing pearls,
And pine and die because of the great
sum

Of universal anguish?—Show me a tear
Wet as Cordelia's, in eyes bright as
yours,

Because the world is mad! You cannot
count,

That you should weep for this account,
not you!

You weep for what you know. A red-
haired child

Sick in a fever, if you touch him once,
Though but so little as with a finger-tip,
Will set you weeping; but a million
sick . . .

You could as soon weep for the rule of
three,

Or compound fractions. Therefore, this
same world

Uncomprehended by you, must remain
Uninfluenced by you. Women as you
are,

Mere women, personal and passionate,
You give us doating mothers, and perfect
wives,

Sublime Madonnas, and enduring saints!
We get no Christ from you,—and verily
We shall not get a poet, in my mind.'

'With which conclusion you conclude' . . .

'But this—
That you, Aurora, with the large live
brow

And steady eyelids, cannot condescend
To play at art, as children play at
swords,

To show a pretty spirit, chiefly admired
Because true action is impossible.

You never can be satisfied with praise
Which men give women when they judge
a book

Not as mere work, but as mere woman's
work,

Expressing the comparative respect
Which means the absolute scorn. 'Oh,
excellent!

'What grace! what facile turns! what
fluent sweeps!

'What delicate discernment . . . almost
thought!

'The book does honour to the sex, we
hoid.

'Among our female authors we make
room

'For this fair writer, and congratulate

'The country that produces in these
times

'Such women, competent to . . . spell.'
'Stop there!'

I answered—burning through his thread
of talk

With a quick flame of emotion,—'You
have read

My soul, if not my book, and argue
well

I would not condescend . . . we will not
say

To such a kind of praise, (a worthless
end

Is praise of all kinds) but to such a use
Of holy art and golden life. I am
young,

And peradventure weak—you tell me
so—

Through being a woman. And, for all
the rest,

Take thanks for justice. I would rather
dance

At fairs on tight-rope, till the babies
dropped

Their gingerbread for joy,—than shift
the types

For tolerable verse, intolerable
To men who act and suffer. Better far

Pursue a frivolous trade by serious
means,

Than a sublime art frivolously.'
'You

Choose nobler work than either, O moist
eyes

And hurrying lips, and heaving heart!
We are young,

Aurora, you and I. The world . . . look
round . . .

The world, we're come too late, is swollen
hard

With perished generations and their
sins:

The civiliser's spade grinds horribly
On dead men's bones, and cannot turn
up soil

That's otherwise than fetid. All suc-
cess

Proves partial failure ; all advance implies
 What's left behind ; all triumph, something crushed
 At the chariot-wheels ; all government, some wrong :
 And rich men make the poor, who curse the rich,
 Who agonise together, rich and poor,
 Under and over, in the social spasm
 And crisis of the ages. Here's an age,
 That makes its own vocation ! here, we have stepped
 Across the bounds of time ! here's nought to see,
 But just the rich man and just Lazarus,
 And both in torments ; with a mediate gulph,
 Though not a hint of Abraham's bosom. Who,
 Being man, Aurora, can stand calmly by
 And view these things, and never tease his soul
 For some great cure ? No physic for this grief,
 In all the earth and heavens too ? ' You believe
 In God, for your part ?—ay ? that He who makes,
 Can make good things from ill things, best from worst,
 As men plant tulips upon dunghills when
 They wish them finest ? ' ' True. A death-heat is
 The same as life-heat, to be accurate ;
 And in all nature is no death at all,
 As men account of death, as long as God
 Stands witnessing for life perpetually,
 By being just God. That's abstract truth, I know,
 Philosophy, or sympathy with God :
 But I, I sympathise with man, not God,
 I think I was a man for chiefly this ;
 And when I stand beside a dying bed,
 It's death to me. Observe,—it had not much
 Consoled the race of mastodons to know
 Before they went to fossil, that anon
 Their place would quicken with the elephant ;
 They were not elephants but mastodons :
 And I, a man, as men are now and not
 As men may be hereafter, feel with men
 In the agonising present.'

' Is it so,'
 I said, ' my cousin ? is the world so bad,
 While I hear nothing of it through the trees ?
 The world was always evil,—but so bad ?'
 ' So bad, Aurora. Dear, my soul is grey
 With poring over the long sum of ill ;
 So much for vice, so much for discontent,
 So much for the necessities of power,
 So much for the connivances of fear,
 Coherent in statistical despairs
 With such a total of distracted life, . .
 To see it down in figures on a page,
 Plain, silent, clear . . as God sees
 through the earth
 The sense of all the graves . . . that's terrible
 For one who is not God, and cannot right
 The wrong he looks on. May I choose indeed
 But vow away my years, my means, my aims,
 Among the helpers, if there's any help
 In such a social strait ? The common blood
 That swings along my veins, is strong enough
 To draw me to this duty.'
 Then I spoke.
 ' I have not stood long on the strand of life,
 And these salt waters have had scarcely time
 To creep so high up as to wet my feet.
 I cannot judge these tides—I shall, perhaps.
 A woman's always younger than a man
 At equal years, because she is disallowed
 Maturing by the outdoor sun and air,
 And kept in long-clothes past the age to walk.
 Ah well, I know you men judge otherwise !
 You think a woman ripens as a peach,
 In the cheeks, chiefly. Pass it to me now ;
 I'm young in age, and younger still, I think,
 As a woman. But a child may say
 To a bishop's prayer and feel the way it goes ;
 And I, incapable to loose the knot

Of social questions, can approve, applaud
August compassion. christian thoughts
that shoot

Beyond the vulgar white of personal
aims.

Accept my reverence.'

There he glowed on me
With all his face and eyes. 'No other
help?'

Said he—'no more than so?'

'What help?' I asked,
'You'd scorn my help,—as Nature's self,
you say,

Has scorned to put her music in my
mouth

Because a woman's. Do you now turn
round

And ask for what a woman cannot give?'

'For what she only can,' I turn and ask.
He answered, catching up my hands in
his,

And dropping on me from his high-eaved
brow

The full weight of his soul,—'I ask for
love,

And that, she can; for life in fellowship
Through bitter duties—that, I know she
can;

For wifehood . . will she?'

'Now,' I said, 'may God
Be witness 'twixt us two!' and with the
word,

Meseemed I floated into a sudden light
Above his stature,—'am I proved too
weak

To stand alone, yet strong enough to
bear

Such leaners on my shoulder? poor to
think,

Yet rich enough to sympathise with
thought?

Incompetent to sing, as blackbirds can,
Yet competent to love, like HIM?'

I paused:
Perhaps I darkened, as the light house
will

That turns upon the sea. 'It's always
so!

Anything does for a wife.'

'Aurora, dear,
And dearly honored' . . he pressed in
at once

With eager utterance,—'you translate
me ill.

I do not contradict my thought of you
Which is most reverent, with another
thought

Found less so. If your sex is weak for
art,

(And I who said so, did but honour you
By using truth in courtship) it is strong
For life and duty. Place your second
heart

In mine, and let us blossom for the world
That wants love's colour in the grey of
time.

My talk, meanwhile, is arid to you, ay,
Since all my talk can only set you where
You look down coldly on the arena-
heaps

Of headless bodies, shapeless, indistinct!
The Judgment-Angel scarce would find
his way

Through such a heap of generalised dis-
tress

To the individual man with lips and
eyes—

Much less Aurora. Ah my sweet, come
down,

And hand in hand we'll go where yours
shall touch

These victims, one by one! till one by
one,

The formless, nameless trunk of every
man

Shall seem to wear a head with hair you
know.

And every woman catch your mother's
face

To melt you into passion.'

'I am a girl,'

I answered slowly: 'you do well to name
My mother's face. Though far too car-
ly, alas.

God's hand did interpose 'twixt it and
me,

I know so much of love, as used to shine
In that face and another. Just so much;

No more indeed at all. I have not seen
So much love since, I pray you pardon
me,

As answers even to make a marriage
with

In this cold land of England. What you
love,

Is not a woman, Romney, but a cause:
You want a helpmate, not a mistress, sir
A wife to help your ends . . in her n
end!

Your cause is noble, your ends excellent,
But I, being most unworthy of these and
that,
Do otherwise conceive of love. Fare-
well.'

'Farewell, Aurora? you reject me thus?'
He said.

'Sir, you were married long ago,
You have a wife already whom you love,
Your social theory. Bless you both, I
say.

For my part, I am scarcely meek enough
To be the handmaid of a lawful spouse.
Do I look a Hagar, think you?'

'So you jest!' 'Nay so, I speak in earnest,' I replied.
'You treat of marriage too much like, at
least,

A chief apostle; you would bear with
you
A wife . . . a sister . . . shall we speak it
out?

A sister of charity.'

'Then, must it be
Indeed farewell? And was I so far
wrong

In hope and in illusion, when I took
The woman to be nobler than the man,
Yourself the noblest woman,—in the
use

And comprehension of what love is,—
love,

That generates the likeness of itself
Through all heroic duties? so far wrong,
In saying bluntly, venturing truth on
love,

'Come, human creature, love and work
with me,'—

Instead of 'Lady, thou art wondrous
fair,

'And, where the Graces walk before, the
Muse

'Will follow at the lighting of the eyes,
'And where the Muse walks, lovers
need to creep:

'Turn round and love me, or I die of
love.'

With quiet indignation I broke in.

'You misconceive the question like a
man,

Who sees a woman as the complement
Of his sex merely. You forget too much
That every creature, female as the male,

Stands single in responsible act and
thought,

As also in birth and death. Whoever
says

To a loyal woman, 'Love and work with
me,'

Will get fair answers if the work and
love,

Being good themselves, are good for her
—the best

She was born for. Women of a softer
mood,

Surprised by men when scarcely awake
to life,

Will sometimes only hear the first word,
love,

And catch up with it any kind of work,
Indifferent, so that dear love go with it:

I do not blame such women, though, for
love,

They pick much oakum; earth's fanatics
make

Too frequently heaven's saints. But *me*,
your work

Is not the best for,—nor your love the
best,

Nor able to commend the kind of work
For love's sake merely. Ah, you force
me, sir,

To be over-bold in speaking of myself,
I too have my vocation,—work to do,

The heavens and earth have set me,
since I changed

My father's face for theirs,—and, though
your world

Were twice as wretched as you represent,
Most serious work, most necessary work

As any of the economists'. Reform,
Make trade a Christian possibility,

And individual right no general wrong;
Wipe out earth's furrows of the Thine
and Mine,

And leave one green for men to play at
bowls;

With innings for them all! . . . what then,
indeed,

If mortals are not greater by the head
Than any of their prosperities? what
then,

Unless the artist keep up open roads
Betwixt the seen and unseen,—bursting
through

The best of your conventions with his
best,

The speakable, imaginable best

God bids him speak, to prove what lies
beyond
Both speech and imagination? A starved
man
Exceeds a fat beast: we'll not barter,
sir,
The beautiful for barley.—And, even so,
I hold you will not compass your poor
ends
Of barley-feeding and material ease,
Without a poet's individualism
To work your universal. It takes a
soul
To move a body: it takes a high-souled
man
To move the masses . . . even to a cleaner
style;
It takes the ideal, to blow a hair's-breadth
off
The dust of the actual.—Ah, your Four-
iers failed,
Because not poets enough to understand
That life develops from within.—For
me,
Perhaps I am not worthy, as you say,
Of work like this . . . perhaps a woman's
soul
Aspires, and not creates: yet we aspire,
And yet I'll try out your perhapses, sir;
And if I fail . . . why, burn me up my
straw
Like other false works—I'll not ask for
grace,
Your scorn is better, cousin Romney. I
Who love my art, could never wish it
lower
To suit my stature. I may love my art.
You'll grant that even a woman may love
art,
Seeing that to waste true love on any-
thing
Is womanly, past question.'

I retain

The very last word which I said that
day,
As you the creaking of the door, years
past,
Which let upon you such disabling news
You ever after have been graver. He,
His eyes, the motions in his silent mouth,
Were fiery points on which my words
were caught,
Transfixed for ever in my memory
For his sake, not their own. And yet I
know

I did not love him . . . nor he me . . . that's
sure . . .
And what I said, is unrepented of,
As truth is always. Yet . . . a princely
man !—
If hard to me, heroic for himself!
He bears down on me through the slant-
ing years,
The stronger for the distance. If he
had loved,
Ay, loved me, with that retributive
face, . . .
I might have been a common woman
now,
And happier, less known and less left
alone;
Perhaps a better woman after all,—
With chubby children hanging on my
neck
To keep me low and wise. Ah me, the
vines
That bear such fruit, are proud to stoop
with it.
The palm stands upright in a realm of
sand.

And I, who spoke the truth then, stand
upright,
Still worthy of having spoken out the
truth,
By being content I spoke it, though it set
Him there, me here.—O woman's vile
remorse,
To hanker after a mere name, a show,
A supposition, a potential love!
Does every man who names love in our
lives,
Become a power for that? is love's true
thing
So much best to us, that what personates
love
Is next best? A potential love, for-
sooth!
I'm not so vile. No, no—he cleaves, I
think,
This man, this image, . . . chiefly for the
wrong
And shock he gave my life, in finding me
Precisely where the devil of my youth
Had set me, on those mountain-peaks of
hope
All glittering with the dawn-dew, all
erect
And famished for the noon,—exclaiming,
while

I looked for empire and much tribute,
'Come,
I have some worthy work for thee below.

Come, sweep my barns and keep my hospitals,
And I will pay thee with a current coin
Which men give women.'

As we spoke, the grass
Was trod in haste beside us, and my aunt,
With smile distorted by the sun,—face,
voice,

As much at issue with the summer-day
As if you brought a candle out of doors,
Broke in with, 'Romney, here!—My
child, entreat

Your cousin to the house, and have your talk,
If girls must talk upon their birthdays.
Come.'

He answered for me calmly, with pale lips
That seemed to motion for a smile in vain.
'The talk is ended, madam, where we stand.

Your brother's daughter has dismissed me here;
And all my answer can be better said
Beneath the trees, than wrong by such a word
Your house's hospitalities. Farewell.'

With that he vanished, I could hear his heel
Ring bluntly in the lane, as down he leapt
The short way from us.—Then a measured speech
Withdrew me. 'What means this, Aurora Leigh?
My brother's daughter has dismissed my guests?'

The lion in me felt the keeper's voice,
Through all its quivering dewlaps: I was quelled
Before her,—meekened to the child she knew:
I prayed her pardon, said, 'I had little thought
To give dismissal to a guest of hers,
In letting go a friend of mine who came

To take me into service as a wife,—
No more than that, indeed.'
'No more, no more?'
Pray Heaven,' she answered, 'that I was not mad.

I could not mean to tell her to her face
That Romney Leigh had asked me for a wife,
And I refused him?'

'Did he ask?' I said;
'I think he rather stooped to take me up
For certain uses which he found to do
For something called a wife. He never asked.'

'What stuff!' she answered; 'are they queens, these girls?
They must have mantles, stitched with twenty silks,
Spread out upon the ground, before they'll step
One footstep for the noblest lover born.'

'But I am born,' I said with firmness,
'I,
To walk another way than his, dear aunt.'

'You walk, you walk! A babe at thirteen months
Will walk as well as you,' she cried in haste,
'Without a steady finger. Why, you child,
God help you, you are groping in the dark,
For all this sunlight. You suppose, perhaps,
That you, sole offspring of an opulent man,
Are rich and free to choose a way to walk?

You think, and it's a reasonable thought,
That I beside, being well to do in life,
Will leave my handful in my niece's hand
When death shall paralyse these fingers?
Pray,
Pray, child,—albeit, I know you love me not,
As if you loved me, that I may not die!
For when I die and leave you, out you go,
(Unless I make room for you in my grave)

Unhoused, unfed, my dear, poor brother's lamb,
 (Ah heaven,—that pains!)—without a right to crop
 A single blade of grass beneath these trees,
 Or cast a lamb's small shadow on the lawn,
 Unfed, unfolded! Ah, my brother, here's
 The fruit you planted in your foreign loves!—
 Ay, there's the fruit he planted! never look
 Astonished at me with your mother's eyes,
 For it was they who set you where you are,
 An undowered orphan. Child, your father's choice
 Of that said mother, disinherited
 His daughter, his and hers. Men do not think
 Of sons and daughters, when they fall in love,
 So much more than of sisters; otherwise
 He would have paused to ponder what he did,
 And shrunk before that clause in the entail
 Excluding offspring by a foreign wife
 (The clause set up a hundred years ago
 By a Leigh who wedded a French dancing-girl
 And had his heart danced over in return)
 But this man shrank at nothing, never thought
 Of you, Aurora, any more than me—
 Your mother must have been a pretty thing,
 For all the coarse Italian blacks and browns,
 To make a good man, which my brother was,
 Uncharry of the duties to his house;
 But so it fell indeed. Our cousin Vane,
 Vane Leigh, the father of this Romney,
 wrote
 Directly on your birth, to Italy,
 'I ask your baby daughter for my son
 In whom the entail now merges by the law.
 Betroth her to us out of love, instead

Of colder reasons, and she shall not lose
 By love or law from henceforth'—so he wrote;
 A generous cousin, was my cousin Vane.
 Remember how he drew you to his knee
 The year you came here, just before he died,
 And hollowed out his hands to hold your cheeks,
 And wished them redder,—you remember Vane?
 And now his son who represents our house
 And holds the fiefs and manors in his place,
 To whom reverts my pittance when I die,
 (Except a few books and a pair of shawls)
 The boy is generous like him, and prepared
 To carry out his kindest word and thought
 To you, Aurora. Yes, a fine young man
 Is Romney Leigh; although the sun of youth
 Has shone too straight upon his brain, I know,
 And fevered him with dreams of doing good
 To good-for-nothing people. But wife
 Will put all right, and stroke his temples cool
 With healthy touches' . . .
 I broke in at that.
 I could not lift my heavy heart to breathe
 Till then, but then I raised it, and it fell
 In broken words like these—'No need to wait.
 The dream of doing good to . . . me, at least,
 Is ended, without waiting for a wife
 To cool the fever for him. We've escaped
 That danger . . . thank Heaven for it.'
 'You,' she cried.
 'Have got a fever. What, I talk and talk
 An hour long to you,—I instruct you how
 You cannot eat or drink or stand or sit,
 Or even die, like any decent wretch
 In all this unroofed and unfurnished world,

Without your cousin,—and you still
 maintain
 There's room 'twixt him and you, for
 flirting fans
 And running knots in eyebrows! You
 must have
 A pattern lover sighing on his knee:
 You do not count enough a noble heart,
 Above book-patterns, which this very
 morn
 Unclosed itself in two dear fathers'
 names
 To embrace your orphaned life! fie, fie!
 But stay,
 I write a word, and counteract this sin.'

She would have turned to leave me, but
 I clung.
 'O sweet my father's sister, hear my
 word
 Before you write yours. Cousin Vane
 did well,
 And cousin Romney well,—and I well
 too,
 In casting back with all my strength and
 will
 The good they meant me. O my God,
 my God!
 God meant me good, too, when he hin-
 dered me
 From saying 'yes' this morning. If you
 write
 A word, it shall be 'no.' I say no, no!
 I tie up 'no' upon His altar-horns,
 Quite out of reach of perjury! At least
 My soul is not a pauper; I can live
 At least my soul's life, without alms from
 men;
 And if it must be in heaven instead of
 earth,
 Let heaven look to it,—I am not afraid.'
 She seized my hands with both hers,
 strained them fast,
 And drew her probing and unscrupulous
 eyes
 Right through me, body and heart. 'Yet,
 foolish Sweet,
 You love this man. I have watched you
 when he came,
 And when he went, and when we've
 talked of him;
 I am not old for nothing; I can tell
 The weather-signs of love—you love this
 man.'

Girls blush sometimes because they are
 alive,
 Half wishing they were dead to save the
 shame.
 The sudden blush devours them, neck
 and brow;
 They have drawn too near the fire of life,
 like gnats,
 And flare up bodily, wings and all. What
 then?
 Who's sorry for a gnat . . . or girl?

I blushed.
 I feel the brand upon my forehead now
 Strike hot, sear deep, as guiltless men
 may feel
 The felon's iron, say, and scorn the
 mark
 Of what they are not. Most illogical
 Irrational nature of our womanhood,
 That blushes one way, feels another
 way,
 And prays, perhaps, another! After all,
 We cannot be the equal of the male,
 Who rules his blood a little.

For although
 I blushed indeed, as if I loved the man,
 And her incisive smile, accrediting
 That treason of false witness in my
 blush,
 Did bow me downward like a swathe of
 grass
 Below its level that struck me,—I attest
 The conscious skies and all their daily
 suns,
 I think I loved him not . . . nor then,
 nor since . . .
 Nor ever. Do we love the schoolmas-
 ter,
 Being busy in the woods? much less,
 being poor,
 The overseer of the parish? Do we
 keep
 Our love to pay out debts with?

White and cold
 I grew next moment. As my blood re-
 coiled
 From that imputed ignomy, I made
 My heart great with it. Then, at last, I
 spoke,
 Spoke veritable words but passionate,
 Too passionate perhaps . . . ground up
 with sobs
 To shapeless endings. She let fall my
 hands,

And took her smile off, in sedate disgust,
 As peradventure she had touched a snake,—
 A dead snake, mind !—and, turning round, replied,
 ‘ We’ll leave Italian manners, if you please.
 I think you had an English father, child,
 And ought to find it possible to speak
 A quiet ‘ yes ’ or ‘ no,’ like English girls,
 Without convulsions. In another month
 We’ll take another answer . . no, or yes.’
 With that, she left me in the garden-walk.

I had a father ! yes, but long ago—
 How long it seemed that moment. Oh,
 how far,
 How far and safe, God, dost thou keep
 thy saints
 When once gone from us ! We may call
 against
 The lighted windows of thy fair June-
 heaven
 Where all the souls are happy,—and not
 one,
 Not even my father, look from work or
 play
 To ask, ‘ Who is it that cries after us,
 Below there, in the dusk ?’ Yet formerly
 He turned his face upon me quick
 enough,
 If I said ‘ father.’ Now I might cry
 loud ;
 The little lark reached higher with his
 song
 Than I with crying. Oh, alone, alone,—
 Not troubling any in heaven, nor any on
 earth,
 I stood there in the garden, and looked
 up
 The deaf blue sky that brings the roses
 out
 On such June mornings.

You who keep account
 Of crisis and transition in this life,
 Set down the first time Nature says
 plain ‘ no’
 To some ‘ yes’ in you, and walks over
 you
 In gorgeous sweeps of scorn. We all be-
 gin

By singing with the birds and running
 fast
 With June-days, hand in hand · but once,
 for all,
 The birds must sing against us, and the
 sun
 Strike down upon us like a friend’s
 sword caught
 By an enemy to slay us, while we read
 The dear name on the blade which bites
 at us !—
 That’s bitter and convincing : after that,
 We seldom doubt that something in the
 large
 Smooth order of creation, though no
 more
 Than haply a man’s footstep, has gone
 wrong.

Some tears fell down my cheeks, and
 then I smiled,
 As those smile who have no face in the
 world
 To smile back to them. I had lost a
 friend
 In Romney Leigh ; the thing was sure—
 a friend,
 Who had looked at me most gently now
 and then,
 And spoken of my favourite books . .
 ‘ our books’ . .
 With such a voice ! Well, voice and
 look were now
 More utterly shut out from me, I felt,
 Than even my father’s. Romney now
 was turned
 To a benefactor, to a generous man,
 Who had tied himself to marry . . me,
 instead
 Of such a woman, with low timorous lids
 He lifted with a sudden word one day,
 And left, perhaps, for my sake.—Ah,
 self-tied
 By a contract,—male Iphigenia bound
 At a fatal Aulis for the winds to change,
 (But loose him—they’ll not change :) he
 well might seem
 A little cold and dominant in love !
 He had a right to be dogmatical,
 This poor, good Romney. Love, to him,
 was made
 A simple law-clause. If I married him,
 I would not dare to call my soul my own,
 Which so he had bought and paid for :
 every thought

And every heart-beat down there in the
bill,
Not one found honestly deductible
From any use that pleased him! He
might cut
My body into coins to give away
Among his other paupers; change my
sons,
While I stood dumb as Griseld, for black
babes
Or piteous foundlings; might unques-
tioned set
My right hand teaching in the Ragged
Schools,
My left hand washing in the Public
Baths,
What time my angel of the Ideal
stretched
Both his to me in vain! I could not
claim
The poor right of a mouse in a trap, to
squeal,
And take so much as pity from myself.

Farewell, good Romney! if I loved you
even,
I could but ill afford to let you be
So generous to me. Farewell, friend,
since friend
Betwixt us two, forsooth, must be a
word
So heavily overladen. And, since help
Must come to me from those who love
me not,
Farewell, all helpers—I must help my-
self,
And am alone from henceforth.—Then I
stooped,
And lifted the soiled garland from the
earth,
And set it on my head as bitterly
As when the Spanish monarch crowned
the bones
Of his dead love. So be it. I preserve
That crown still,—in the drawer there!
'twas the first;
The rest are like it;—those Olympian
crowns,
We run for, till we lose sight of the sun
In the dust of the racing chariots!

After that,
Before the evening fell, I had a note
Which ran,—‘Aurora, sweet Chaldean,
you read

My meaning backward like your eastern
books,
While I am from the west, dear. Read
me now
A little plainer. Did you hate me quite
But yesterday? I loved you for my part;
I love you. If I spoke untenderly
This morning, my beloved, pardon it;
And comprehend me that I love you so
I set you on the level of my soul,
And overwashed you with the bitter
brine
Of some habitual thoughts. Henceforth,
my flower,
Be planted out of reach of any such,
And lean the side you please, with all
your leaves!
Write woman’s verses and dream wo-
man’s dreams;
But let me feel your perfume in my
home,
To make my sabbath after working-
days;
Bloom out your youth beside me,—be my
wife.

I wrote in answer—‘We, Chaldeans, dis-
cern
Still farther than we read. I know your
heart,
And shut it like the holy book it is,
Reserved for mild-eyed saints to pore
upon
Betwixt their prayers at vespers. Well,
you’re right,
I did not surely hate you yesterday;
And yet I do not love you enough to-
day
To wed you, cousin Romney. Take this
word,
And let it stop you as a generous man
From speaking farther. You may tease,
indeed,
And blow about my feelings, or my
leaves,—
And here’s my aunt will help you with
east winds,
And break a stalk, perhaps, tormenting
me:
But certain flowers grow near as deep as
trees,
And, cousin, you’ll not move my root,
not you,
With all your confluent storms. Then
let me grow

Within my wayside hedge, and pass your way !
 This flower has never as much to say to you
 As the antique tomb which said to travellers, 'Pause,
 'Siste, viator.' ' Ending thus, I signed.

The next week passed in silence, so the next,
 And several after : Romney did not come,
 Nor my aunt chide me. I lived on and on,
 As if my heart were kept beneath a glass,
 And everybody stood, all eyes and ears,
 To see and hear it tick. I could not sit,
 Nor walk, nor take a book, nor lay it down,
 Not sew on steadily, nor drop a stitch
 And a sigh with it, but I felt her looks
 Still cleaving to me, like the sucking asp

To Cleopatra's breast, persistently
 Through the intermittent pantings. Being observed,
 When observation is not sympathy,
 Is just being tortured. If she said a word,
 A 'thank you,' or an 'if it please you, dear,'

She meant a commination, or, at best,
 An exorcism against the devildom
 Which plainly held me. So with all the house,

Susannah could not stand and twist my hair,
 Without such glancing at the looking-glass

To see my face there, that she missed the plait.

And John,—I never sent my plate for soup,

Or did not send it, but the foolish John
 Resolved the problem, 'twixt his nap-kined thumbs,

Of what was signified by taking soup
 Or choosing mackerel. Neighbors who dropped in

On morning visits, feeling a joint wrong,
 Smiled admonition, sate uneasily,
 And talked with measured, emphasised reserve,

Of parish news, like doctors to the sick,

When not called in,—as if, with leave to speak,
 They might say something. Nay, the very dog
 Would watch me from his sun patch on the floor,
 In alternation with the large black fly
 Not yet in reach of snapping. So I lived.

A Roman died so : smeared with honey, teased
 By insects, stared to torture by the noon :
 And many patient souls 'neath English roofs
 Have died like Romans. I, in looking back,
 Wish only, now, I had borne the plague of all
 With meeker spirits than were rife in Rome.

For, on the sixth week, the dead sea broke up,
 Dashed suddenly through beneath the heel of Him
 Who stands upon the sea and earth, and swears

Time shall be nevermore. The clock struck nine

That morning too—no lark was out of tune ;

The hidden farms among the hills breathed straight

Their smoke toward the heaven : the lime-tree scarcely stirred

Beneath the blue weight of the cloudless sky,

Though still the July air came floating through

The woodbine at my window, in and out,

With touches of the out-door country-news

For a bending forehead. There I sate, and wished

That morning-truce of God would last till eve,

Or longer. 'Sleep,' I thought, 'late sleepers,—sleep,

And spare me yet the burden of your eyes.'

Then, suddenly, a single ghastly shriek

Tore upwards from the bottom of the house.
 Like one who wakens in a grave and shrieks,
 The still house seemed to shriek itself alive,
 And shudder through its passages and stairs
 With slam of doors and clash of bells.—I sprang,
 I stood up in the middle of the room,
 And there confronted at my chamber-door,
 A white face,—shivering, ineffectual lips.

‘Come, come,’ they tried to utter, and I went;
 As if a ghost had drawn me at the point
 Of a fiery finger through the uneven dark,
 I went with reeling footsteps down the stair,
 Nor asked a question.

There she sate, my aunt,—
 Bolt upright in the chair beside her bed,
 Whose pillow had no dint! She had used no bed
 For that night’s sleeping . . yet slept well. My God,
 The dumb derision of that grey, peaked face
 Concluded something grave against the sun,
 Which filled the chamber with its July burst

When Susan drew the curtains, ignorant
 Of who sate open-eyed behind her. There

She sate . . it sate . . we said ‘she’ yesterday . .

And held a letter with unbroken seal
 As Susan gave it to her hand last night:
 All night she had held it. If its news referred

To duchies or to dunghills, not an inch
 She’d budge, ’twas obvious, for such worthless odds,

Nor, though the stars were suns and overburned

Their spheric limitations, swallowing up
 Like wax the azure spaces, could they force

Those open eyes to wink once. What last sight

Had left them blank and flat so,—drawing out

The faculty of vision from the roots,
 As nothing more, worth seeing, remained behind?

Were those the eyes that watched me, worried me?

That dogged me up and down the hours and days,

A beaten, breathless, miserable soul?
 And did I pray, a half hour back, but so,
 To escape the burden of those eyes . . those eyes?

‘Sleep late,’ I said.—

Why now, indeed, they sleep.
 God answers sharp and sudden on some prayers,

And thrusts the thing we have prayed for in our face,

A gauntlet with a gift in’t. Every wish
 Is like a prayer . . with God.

I had my wish,
 To read and meditate the thing I would,
 To fashion all my life upon my thought,
 And marry or not marry. Henceforth,
 none

Could disapprove me, vex me, hamper me.

Full ground-room, in this desert newly made,

For Babylon or Balbec,—when the breath,

Now choked with sand, returns for building towns.

The heir came over on the funeral day,
 And we two cousins met before the dead,
 With two pale faces. Was it death or life

That moved us? When the will was read and done,

The official guest and witnesses withdrawn,

We rose up in a silence almost hard,
 And looked at one another. Then I said,

‘Farewell, my cousin.’

But he touched, just touched
 My hatstrings tied for going, (at the door

The carriage stood to take me) and said low,

His voice a little unsteady through his smile,

‘Siste, viator.’

‘Is there time,’ I asked,

'In these last days of railroads, to stop short
Like Cæsar's chariot (weighing half a ton)

On the Appian road for morals?'

'There is time,'

He answered grave, 'for necessary words,

Inclusive, trust me, of no epitaph

On man or act, my cousin. We have read

A will, which gives you all the personal goods

And funded monies of your aunt.'

'I thank

Her memory for it. With three hundred pounds

We buy in England even, clear standing-room

To stand and work in. Only two hours since,

I fancied I was poor.'

'And cousin, still

You're richer than you fancy. The will says,

Three hundred pounds, and any other sum

Of which the said testatrix dies possessed.

I say she died possessed of other sums.'

'Dear Romney, need we chronicle the pence?

I'm richer than I thought—that's evident.

Enough so.'

'Listen rather. You've to do With business and a cousin,' he resumed,

'And both, I fear, need patience. Here's the fact.

The other sum (there *is* another sum,

Unspecified in any will which dates

After possession, yet bequeathed as much

And clearly as those said three hundred pounds)

Is thirty thousand. You will have it paid

When? where? My duty troubles you with words.'

He struck the iron when the bar was hot;

No wonder if my eyes sent out some sparks.

'Pause there! I thank you. You are delicate

In glosing gifts;—but I, who share your blood,

Am rather made for giving, like yourself,

Than taking, like your pensioners. Farewell.'

He stopped me with a gesture of calm pride.

'A Leigh,' he said, 'gives largesse and gives love,

But gloses never: if a Leigh could glose, He would not do it, moreover, to a Leigh,

With blood trained up along nine centuries

To hound and hate a lie from eyes like yours.

And now we'll make the rest as clear; your aunt

Possessed these monies.'

'You will make it clear,

My cousin, as the honour of us both,

Or one of us speaks vainly—that's not I. My aunt possessed this sum,—inherited

From whom, and when? bring documents, prove dates.'

'Why now indeed you throw your bonnet off,

As if you had time left for a logarithm!

The faith's the want. Dear cousin, give me faith,

And you shall walk this road with siken shoes,

As clean as any lady of our house

Supposed the proudest. Oh, I comprehend

The whole position from your point of sight.

I oust you from your father's halls and lands,

And make you poor by getting rich—that's law;

Considering which, in common circumstance,

You would not scruple to accept from me Some compensation, some sufficiency

Of income—that were justice; but alas,

I love you . . . that's mere nature; you reject

My love . . that's nature also; and at once,
 You cannot, from a suitor disallowed,
 A hand thrown back as mine is, into yours
 Receive a doit, a farthing, . . not for the world!
 That's woman's etiquette, and obviously
 Exceeds the claim of nature, law, and right,
 Unanswerable to all. I grant, you see,
 'The case as you conceive it,—leave you room
 To sweep your ample skirts of womanhood;
 While, standing humbly squeezed against the wall,
 I own myself excluded from being just,
 Restrained from paying indubitable debts,
 Because denied from giving you my soul—
 That's my misfortune!—I submit to it
 As if, in some more reasonable age,
 'Twould not be less inevitable. Enough.
 You'll trust me, cousin, as a gentleman,
 'To keep your honour, as you count it, pure,
 Your scruples (just as if I thought them wise)
 Safe and inviolate from gifts of mine.'

I answered mild but earnest. 'I believe
 In no one's honour which another keeps,
 Nor man's nor woman's. As I keep, myself,
 My truth and my religion, I depute
 No father, though I had one this side death,
 Nor brother, though I had twenty, much less you,
 Though twice my cousin, and once Romney Leigh,
 To keep my honour pure. You face, to-day,
 A man who wants instruction, mark me, not
 A woman who wants protection. As to a man.
 Show manhood, speak out plainly, be precise
 With facts and dates. My aunt inherited
 This sum, you say—'

'I said she died possessed

Of this, dear cousin.'

'Not by heritage.
 Thank you: we're getting to the facts at last.
 Perhaps she played at commerce with a ship
 Which came in heavy with Australian gold?
 Or touched a lottery with her finger-end,
 Which tumbled on a sudden into her lap
 Some old Rhine tower or principality?
 Perhaps she had to do with a marine
 Sub-transatlantic railroad, which pre-pays
 As well as pre-supposes? or perhaps
 Some stale ancestral debt was after-paid
 By a hundred years, and took her by surprise?—
 You shake your head, my cousin; I guess ill.'

'You need not guess, Aurora, nor deride,—
 The truth is not afraid of hurting you.
 You'll find no cause, in all your scruples, why
 Your aunt should cavil at a deed of gift
 'Twixt her and me.'

'I thought so—ah! a gift.'

'You naturally thought so,' he resumed.
 'A very natural gift.'

'A gift, a gift!
 Her individual life being stranded high
 Above all want, approaching opulence,
 Too haughty was she to accept a gift
 Without some ultimate aim: ah, ah, I see,—
 A gift intended plainly for her heirs,
 And so accepted . . if accepted . . ah,
 Indeed that might be; I am snared perhaps,
 Just so. But, cousin, shall I pardon you,
 If thus you have caught me with a cruel springe?'

He answered gently, 'Need you tremble and pant
 Like a netted lioness? is't my fault, mine,
 That you're a grand wild creature of the woods,
 And hate the stall built for you? Any way,
 Though triply netted, need you glare at me?'

I do not hold the cords of such a net ;
You're free from me, Aurora !'

'Now may God
Deliver me from this strait ! This gift
of yours

Was tendered . . when ? accepted . .
when ?' I asked.

'A month . . a fortnight since ? Six
weeks ago

It was not tendered. By a word she
dropped

I know it was not tendered nor received.
When was it ? bring your dates.'

'What matters when ?
A half-hour ere she died, or a half-year,
Secured the gift, maintains the heritage
Inviolable with law. As easy pluck
The golden stars from heaven's embroi-
dered stole,

To pin them on the grey side of this
earth,

As make you poor again, thank God.'

'Not poor
Nor clean again from henceforth, you
thank God ?

Well, sir—I ask you . . I insist at
need . .

Vouchsafe the special date, the special
date.'

'The day before her death-day,' he re-
plied,

'The gift was in her hands. We'll find
that deed,

And certify that date to you.'

As one
Who has climbed a mountain-height and
carried up

His own heart climbing, panting in his
throat

With the toil of the ascent, takes breath
at last,

Looks back in triumph—so I stood and
looked:

Dear cousin Romney, we have reached
the top

Of this steep question, and may rest, I
think.

But first.—I pray you pardon, that the
shock

And surge of natural feeling and event
Had made me oblivious of acquainting
you

That this, this letter . . unread, mark,—
still sealed,

Was found enfolded in the poor dead
hand:

That spirit of hers had gone beyond the
address.

Which could not find her though you
wrote it clear,—

I know your writing, Romney,—recog-
nise

The open-hearted A, the liberal sweep
Of the G. Now listen,—let us under-
stand ;

You will not find that famous deed of
gift,

Unless you find it in the letter here,
Which, not being mine, I give you back.

—Refuse

To take the letter ? well then—you and
I,

As writer and as heiress, open it
Together by your leave.—Exactly so :

The words in which the noble offering's
made,

Are nobler still, my cousin ; and, I own,
'The proudest and most delicate heart
alive,

Distracted from the measure of the gift
By such a grace in giving, might accept
Your largesse without thinking any
more

Of the burthen of it, than King Solomon
Considered, when he wore his holy ring
Charactered over with the ineffable spell,
How many carats of fine gold made up
Its money-value. So, Leigh gives to
Leigh—

Or rather, might have given, observe !—
for that's

The point we come to. Here's a proof
of gift,

But here's no proof, sir, of acceptancy,
But rather, disproof. Death's black dust,
being blown,

Infiltrated through every secret fold
Of this sealed letter by a puff of fate,
Dried up for ever the fresh-written ink,
Annulled the gift, disutilised the grace,
And left these fragments.'

As I spoke, I tore
The paper up and down, and down and
up

And crosswise, till it fluttered from my
hands,

As forest-leaves, stripped suddenly and
rapt

By a whirlwind on Valdarno, drop again,

Drop slow, and strew the melancholy
ground
Before the amazed hills . . . why, so, in-
deed,
I'm writing like a poet, somewhat large
In the type of the image,—and exagger-
ate
A small thing with a great thing, topping
it!—
But then I'm thinking how his eyes look-
ed . . . his,
With what despondent and surprised re-
proach!
I think the tears were in them, as he look-
ed—
I think the manly mouth just trembled.
Then
He broke the silence.

‘I may ask, perhaps,
Although no stranger . . . only Romney
Leigh,
Which means still less . . . than Vincent
Carrington
Your plans in going hence, and where you
go.
This cannot be a secret.’

‘All my life
Is open to you, cousin. I go hence
To London, to the gathering-place of
souls,
To live mine straight out, vocally, in
books;
Harmoniously for others, if indeed
A woman's soul, like man's, be wide
enough
To carry the whole octave (that's to
prove)
Or, if I fail, still purely by myself.
Pray God be with me, Romney.’

‘Ah, poor child,
Who fight against the mother's 'tiring
hand,
And choose the headsman's! May God
change his world
For your sake, sweet, and make it mild
as heaven,
And juster than I have found you!’

But I paused.
‘And you, my cousin?’—

I, he said.—‘you ask?
You care to ask? Well, girls have curi-
ous minds,
And fain would know the end of every-
thing,

Of cousins, therefore, with the rest. For
me,
Aurora, I've my work: you know my
work;
And having missed this year some per-
sonal hope,
I must beware the rather that I miss
No reasonable duty. While you sing
Your happy pastorals of the meads and
trees,
Bethink you that I go to impress and
prove
On stifled brains and deafened ears, stun-
ned deaf,
Crushed dull with grief, that nature sings
itself,
And needs no mediate poet, lute or voice,
To make it vocal. While you ask of
men
Your audience, I may get their leave
perhaps
For hungry orphans to say audibly
‘We're hungry, see,’—for beaten and
bullied wives
To hold their unweaned babies up in
sight,
Whom orphanage would better; and for
all
To speak and claim their portion . . . by
no means
Of the soil, . . . but of the sweat in till-
ing it,
Since this is now-a-days turned privilege,
To have only God's curse on us, and not
man's.
Such work I have for doing, elbow-
deep
In social problems,—as you tie your
rhymes,
To draw my uses to cohere with needs
And bring the uneven world back to its
round;
Or, failing so much, fill up, bridge at
least
To smoother issues, some abysmal
cracks
And fiends of earth, intestine heats have
made
To keep men separate, ~ using story
shifts
Of hospitals, almshouses, infant schools,
And other practical stuff of partial good,
You lovers of the beautiful and whole,
Despise by system.’

‘I despise? The scorn

Is yours, my cousin. Poets become such,
 Through scorning nothing. You decry
 them for
 The good of beauty sung and taught by
 them,
 While they respect your practical partial
 good
 As being a part of beauty's self. Adieu !
 When God helps all the workers for his
 world,
 The singers shall have help of Him, not
 last.'

He smiled as men smile when they will
 not speak
 Because of something bitter in the
 thought ;
 And still I feel his melancholy eyes
 Look judgment on me. It is seven years
 since :
 I know not if 'twas pity or 'twas scorn
 Has made them so far-reaching : judge
 it ye
 Who have had to do with pity more than
 love,
 And scorn than hatred. I am used,
 since then,
 To other ways, from equal men. But so,
 Even so, we let go hands, my cousin
 and I,
 And, in between us, rushed the torrent-
 world
 To blanch our faces like divided rocks,
 And bar for ever mutual sight and touch
 Except through swirl of spray and all
 that roar.

THIRD BOOK.

'TO-DAY thou girdest up thy loins thy-
 self,
 And goest where thou wouldest : pres-
 ently
 Others shall gird thee,' said the Lord,
 'to go
 Where thou wouldest not.' He spoke to
 Peter thus,
 To signify the death which he should die
 When crucified head downwards.
 If He spoke
 To Peter then, He speaks to us the
 same ;
 The word suits many different martyr-
 doms,

And signifies a multiform of death,
 Although we scarcely die apostles, we,
 And have mislaid the keys of heaven and
 earth.

For 'tis not in mere death that men die
 most ;
 And, after our first girding of the loins
 In youth's fine linen and fair broidery
 To run up hill and meet the rising sun,
 We are apt to sit tired, patient as a fool.
 While others gird us with the violent
 bands
 Of social figments, feints, and formal-
 isms,
 Reversing our straight nature, lifting up
 Our base needs, keeping down our lofty
 thoughts,
 Head downward on the cross-sticks of
 the world.
 Yet He can pluck us from that shameful
 cross.
 God, set our feet low and our forehead
 high,
 And show us how a man was made to
 walk !

Leave the lamp, Susan, and go to bed.
 The room does very well ; I have to
 write
 Beyond the stroke of midnight. Get
 away ;
 Your steps, for ever buzzing in the room,
 Tease me like gnats. Ah, letters ! throw
 them down
 At once, as I must have them, to be
 sure,
 Whether I bid you never bring me such
 At such an hour, or bid you. No ex-
 cuse.
 You choose to bring them, as I choose
 perhaps
 To throw them in the fire. Now get to
 bed,
 And dream, if possible, I am not cross.

Why what a pettish, petty thing I grow,—
 A mere, mere woman,—a mere flaccid
 nerve,
 A kerchief left out all night in the rain,
 Turned soft so,—overtasked and over-
 strained
 And overlived in this close London life !
 And yet I should be stronger.

Never burn

Your letters, poor Aurora ! for they stare
 With red seals from the table, saying
 each,
 ' Here's something that you know not.'
 Out alas,
 'Tis scarcely that the world's more good
 and wise
 Or even straighter and more consequent
 Since yesterday at this time—yet, again,
 If but one angel spoke from Ararat,
 I should be very sorry not to hear:
 So open all the letters ! let me read.
 Blanche Ord, the writer in the ' Lady's
 Fan,
 Requests my judgment on . . that, afterwards.
 Kate Ward desires the model of my
 cloak,
 And signs, ' Elisha to you.' Pringle
 Sharpe
 Presents his work on ' Social Conduct,'
 . . craves
 A little money for his pressing-debts . .
 From me, who scarce have money for my
 needs,
 Art's fiery chariot which we journey in
 Being apt to singe our singing-robcs to
 holes.
 Although you ask me for my cloak, Kate
 Ward !
 Here's Rudgely knows it,—editor and
 scribe—
 He's ' forced to marry where his heart is
 not,
 Because the purse lacks where he lost
 his heart.'
 Ah,—lost it because no one picked it
 up !
 That's really loss ! (and passable impu-
 dence.)
 My critic Hammond flatters prettily,
 And wants another volume like the last.
 My critic Belfair wants another book,
 Entirely different, which will sell, (and
 live ?)
 A striking book, yet not a startling book,
 The public blames originalities,
 (You must not pump spring-water un-
 awares
 Upon a gracious public, full of nerves—)
 Good things, not subtle, new yet ortho-
 dox,
 As easy reading as the dog-eared page
 That's fingered by said public fifty years,

Since first taught spelling by its grand-
 mother,
 And yet a revelation in some sort :
 That's hard, my critic Belfair ! So—
 what next ?
 My critic Stokes objects to abstract
 thoughts ;
 ' Call a man, John, a woman, Joan,' says
 he,
 ' And do not prate so of humanities :'
 Whereat I call my critic simply Stokes.
 My critic Jobson recommends more
 mirth
 Because a cheerful genius suits the times,
 And all true poets laugh unquenchably
 Like Shakspeare and the gods. That's
 very hard.
 The gods may laugh, and Shakspeare ;
 Dante smiled
 With such a needy heart on two pale
 lips,
 We cry, ' Weep rather, Dante.' Poems
 are
 Men, if true poems : and who dares ex-
 claim
 At any man's door, ' Here, 'tis under-
 stood
 The thunder fell last week and killed a
 wife,
 And scared a sickly husband—what of
 that ?
 Get up, be merry, shout and clap your
 hands,
 Because a cheerful genius suits the
 times — ?'
 None says so to the man,—and why in-
 deed
 Should any to the poem ? A ninth
 seal ;
 The apocalypse is drawing to a close.
 Ha,—this from Vincent Carrington,—
 ' Dear friend,
 I want good counsel. Will you lend me
 wings
 To raise me to the subject, in a sketch
 I'll bring to-morrow—may I ? at eleven ?
 A poet's only born to turn to use ;
 So save you ! for the world . . and Car-
 rington.'
 (Writ after.) ' Have you heard of Rom-
 ney Leigh
 Beyond what's said of him in newspa-
 pers,
 His phalansteries there, his speeches
 here,

His pamphlets, pleas, and statements,
 everywhere
 He dropped *me*, long ago; but no one
 drops
 A golden apple—though indeed one day
 You hinted that, but jested. Well, at
 least
 You know Lord Howe who sees him . .
 whom he sees
 And *you* see, and I hate to see,—for
 Howe
 Stands high upon the brink of theories,
 Observes the swimmers and cries 'Very
 fine,'
 But keeps dry linen equally,—unlike
 That gallant breaster, Romney. Strange
 it is,
 Such sudden madness seizing a young
 man
 To make earth over again,—while I'm
 content
 To make the pictures. Let me bring
 the sketch.
 A tiptoe Danae, overbold and hot;
 Both arms a-flame to meet her wishing
 Jove
 Halfway, and burn him faster down; the
 face
 And breasts upturned and straining, the
 loose locks
 All glowing with the anticipated gold.
 Or here's another on the self-same theme.
 She lies here—flat upon her prison-floor,
 The long hair swathed about her to the
 heel
 Like wet sea-weed. You dimly see her
 through
 The glittering haze of that prodigious
 rain,
 Half blotted out of nature by a love
 As heavy as fate. I'll bring you either
 sketch.
 I think, myself, the second indicates
 More passion.'

Surely. Self is put away,
 And calm with abdication. She is Jove,
 And no more Danae—greater thus. Per-
 haps
 The painter symbolises unawares
 'Two states of the recipient artist-soul
 One, forward, personal, wanting rever-
 ence,
 Because aspiring only. We'll be calm,
 And know that, when indeed our Joves
 come down

We all turn stiller than we have ever
 been.

Kind Vincent Carrington. I'll let him
 come.
 He talks of Florence,—and may say a
 word
 Of something as it chanced seven years
 ago,
 A hedgehog in the path, or a lame bird,
 In those green country walks, in that
 good time,
 When certainly I was ~~so~~ miserable . .
 I seem to have missed a blessing ever
 since.

The music soars within the little lark,
 And the lark soars. It is not thus with
 men.
 We do not make our places with our
 strains,—
 Content, while they rise, to remain be-
 hind,
 Alone on earth instead of so in heaven.
 No matter—I bear on my broken tale.

When Romney Leigh and I had parted
 thus,
 I took a chamber up three flights of
 stairs
 Not far from being as steep as some larks
 climb,
 And there in a certain house in Kensing-
 ton,
 Three years I lived and worked. Get
 leave to work
 In this world,—'tis the best you get at
 all;
 For God, in cursing, gives us better gifts
 Than men in benediction. God says,
 'Sweat
 For foreheads ' men say ' crowns; and
 so we are crowned,—
 Ay, gashed by some tormenting circle of
 steel
 Which snaps with a secret spring Get
 work; get work;
 Be sure 'tis better than what you work
 to get.

Serene and unafraid of solitude
 I worked the short days out,—and watch-
 ed the sun
 On lurid morns or monstrous afternoons
 Like some Druidic idol's fiery brass

With fixed unflickering outline of dead
 heat,
 From which the blood of wretches pent
 inside
 Seems oozing forth to incarnadine the
 air,
 Push out through fog with his dilated
 disk,
 And startle the slant roofs and chimney-
 pots
 With splashes of fierce colour. Or I
 saw
 Fog only, the great tawny weltering fog,
 Involve the passive city, strangle it
 Alive, and draw it off into the void,
 Spires, bridges, streets, and squares, as
 if a sponge
 Had wiped out London,—or as noon and
 night
 Had clapped together and utterly struck
 out
 The intermediate time, undoing them-
 selves
 In the act. Your city poets see such
 things
 Not despicable. Mountains of the
 south,
 When, drunk and mad with elemental
 wines
 They rend the seamless mist and stand
 up bare,
 Make fewer singers, haply. No one
 sings,
 Descending Sinai; on Parnassus-mount
 You take a mule to climb and not a muse,
 Except in fable and figure: forests chant
 Their anthems to themselves, and leave
 you dumb.
 But sit in London at the day's decline,
 And view the city perish in the mist
 Like Pharaoh's armaments in the deep
 Red Sea,
 The chariots, horsemen, footmen, all the
 host,
 Sucked down and choked to silence—
 then, surprised
 By a sudden sense of vision and of tune,
 You feel as conquerors though you did
 not fight,
 And you and Israel's other singing-girls,
 Ay, Miriam with them, sing the song you
 choose.
 I worked with patience which means al-
 most power.

I did some excellent things indifferently,
 Some bad things excellently. Both were
 praised,
 The latter loudest. And by such a time
 That I myself had set them down as sins
 Scarce worth the price of sackcloth, week
 by week
 Arrived some letter through the sedulous
 post,
 Like these I've read, and yet dissimilar,
 With pretty maiden seals,—initials
 twined
 Of lilies, or a heart marked *Emily*,
 (Convicting Emily of being all heart;)
 Or rarer tokens from young bachelors,
 Who wrote from college with the same
 goosequill,
 Suppose, they had just been plucked of,
 and a snatch
 From Horace, 'Collegisse juvat,' set
 Upon the first page. Many a letter
 signed
 Or unsigned, showing the writers at
 eighteen
 Had lived too long, although a muse
 should help
 Their dawn by holding candles,—com-
 pliments,
 To smile or sigh at. Such could pass
 with me
 No more than coins from Moscow cir-
 culate
 At Paris. Would ten roubles buy a tag
 Of ribbon on the boulevard, worth a
 sou?
 I smiled that all this youth should love
 me,—sighed
 That such a love could scarcely raise them
 up
 To love what was more worthy than my-
 self;
 Then sighed again, again, less gener-
 ously,
 To think the very love they lavished so,
 Proved me inferior. The strong loved
 me not,
 And he . . my cousin Romney . . did
 not write.
 I felt the silent finger of his scorn
 Prick every bubble of my frivolous fame
 As my breath blew it, and resolve it back
 To the air it came from. Oh, I justified
 The measure he had taken of my height:
 The thing was plain—he was not wrong
 a line;

I played at art, made thrusts with a toy-
sword,
Amused the lads and maidens.

Came a sigh

Deep, hoarse with resolution,—I would
work
To better ends, or play in earnest.
'Heavens,
I think I should be almost popular
If this went on!'—I ripped my verses
up,
And found no blood upon the rapier's
point;
The heart in them was just an embryo's
heart
Which never yet had beat, that it should
die;
Just gasps of make-believe galvanic life;
Mere tones, inorganised to any tune.

And yet I felt it in me where it burnt,
Like those hot fire-seeds of creation held
In Jove's clenched palm before the
worlds were sown,—

But I—I was not Juno even! my hand
Was shut in weak convulsion, woman's
ill,

And when I yearned to lose a finger—lo,
The nerve revolted, 'Tis the same even
now:

This hand may never, haply, open large,
Before the spark is quenched, or the
palm charred,
To prove the power not else than by the
pain.

It burns, it burnt—my whole life burnt
with it,
And light, not sunlight and not torch-
light, flashed
My steps out through the slow and diffi-
cult road.

I had grown distrustful of too forward
Springs,
The season's books in drear significance
Of morals, dropping round me. Lively
books?

The ash has livelier verdure than the
yew;
And yet the yew's green longer, and
alone
Found worthy of the holy Christmas
time.

We'll plant more yews if possible, albeit
We plant the graveyards with them.

Day and night

I worked my rhythmic thought, and fur-
rowed up

Both watch and slumber with long lines
of life

Which did not suit their season. The
rose fell

From either cheek, my eyes globed lumi-
nous

Through orbits of blue shadow, and my
pulse

Would shudder along the purple-veined
wrist

Like a shot bird. Youth's stern, set face
to face

With youth's ideal: and when people
came

And said, 'You work too much, you are
looking ill,'

I smiled for pity of them who pitied me,
And thought I should be better soon
perhaps

For those ill looks. Observe—'I,'
means in youth

Just I . . the conscious and eternal soul
With all its ends,—and not the outside
life,

The parcel-man, the doublet of the flesh,
The so much liver, lung, integument,
Which make the sum of 'I' hereafter
when

World-talkers talk of doing well or ill.

I prosper, if I gain a step, although
A nail then pierced my foot: although
my brain

Embracing any truth froze paralysed,
I prosper. I but change my instrument:
I break the spade off, digging deep for
gold,

And catch the mattock up.

I worked on, on.

Through all the bristling fence of nights
and days

Which hedges time in from the eterni-
ties,

I struggled, . . never stopped to note
the stakes

Which hurt me in my course. The mid-
night oil

Would stink sometimes there came
some vulgar needs:

I had to live that therefore I might work,
And, being but poor, I was constrained,
for life,

To work with one hand for the book-sellers
 While working with the other for myself
 And art. You swim with feet as well as hands,
 Or make small way. I apprehended this,—
 In England, no one lives by verse that lives;
 And, apprehending, I resolved by prose
 To make a space to sphere my living verse.
 I wrote for cyclopædias, magazines,
 And weekly papers, holding up my name
 To keep it from the mud. I learnt the use
 Of the editorial 'we' in a review,
 As courtly ladies the fine trick of trains,
 And swept it grandly through the open doors
 As if one could not pass through doors at all
 Save so encumbered. I wrote tales beside,
 Carved many an article on cherry-stones
 To suit light readers,—something in the lines
 Revealing, it was said, the mallet-hand,
 But that, I'll never vouch for. What you do
 For bread, will taste of common grain,
 not grapes.
 Although you have a vineyard in Champagne,—
 Much less in Nephelococcygia,
 As mine was, peradventure.
Having bread
 For just so many days, just breathing room
 For body and verse, I stood up straight
 and worked
 My veritable work. And as the soul
 Which grows within a child makes the child grow,—
 Or as the fiery sap, the touch from God,
 Careering through a tree, dilates the bark
 And roughs with scale and knob, before it strikes
 The summer foliage out in a green flame—
 So life, in deepening with me, deepened all

The course I took, the work I did. Indeed
 The academic law convinced of sin;
 The critics cried out on the falling off,
 Regretting the first manner. But I felt
 My heart's life throbbing in my verse to show
 It lived, it also—certes incomplete,
 Disordered with all Adam in the blood,
 But even its very tumors, warts, and wens,
 Still organised by and implying life.
 A lady called upon me on such a day.
 She had the low voice of your English dames,
 Unused, it seems, to need rise half a note
 To catch attention,—and their quiet mood,
 As if they lived too high above the earth
 For that to put them out in anything:
 So gentle, because verily so proud;
 So wary and afraid of hurting you,
 By no means that you are not really vile,
 But that they would not touch you with their foot
 To push you to your place; so self-possessed
 Yet gracious and conciliating, it takes
 An effort in their presence to speak truth:
 You know the sort of woman,—brilliant stuff,
 And out of nature. 'Lady Waldemar.'
 She said her name quite simply, as if it meant
 Not much indeed, but something,—took my hands,
 And smiled as if her smile could help my case,
 And dropped her eyes on me and let them melt.
 'Is this,' she said, 'the Muse?'
'No sybil even,'
 I answered, 'since she fails to guess the cause
 Which taxed you with this visit, madam.'
'Good,'
 She said, 'I value what's sincere at once;
 Perhaps if I had found a literal Muse,
 The visit might have taxed me. As it is,
 You wear your blue so chiefly in your eyes,

My fair Aurora, in a frank good way,
It comforts me entirely for your fame,
As well as for the trouble of ascent
'To this Olympus.'

There, a silver laugh
Ran rippling through her quickened little
breaths

The steep stair somewhat justified.

'But still
Your ladyship has left me curious why
You dared the risk of finding the said
Muse?'

'Ah,—keep me, notwithstanding to the
point,

Like any pedant. Is the blue in eyes
As awful as in stockings after all,
I wonder, that you'd have my business
out

Before I breathe—exact the epic plunge
In spite of gasps? Well, naturally you
think

I've come here as the lion-hunters go
To deserts, to secure you with a trap,
For exhibition in my drawing-rooms
On zoologic soirées? Not in the least.
Roar softly at me; I am frivolous,
I dare say; I have played at wild-beasts
shows,

Like other women of my class,—but
now

I meet my lion simply as Androcles
Met his . . . when at his mercy.'

So, she bent
Her head, as queens may mock,—then
lifting up

Her eyelids with real grave queenly look,
Which ruled and would not spare, not
even herself,—

'I think you have a cousin:—Romney
Leigh.'

'You bring a word from *him*?—my eyes
leapt up

To the very height of hers,—'a word
from *him*?'

'I bring a word about him, actually.
But first,—she pressed me with her ur-
gent eyes—

'You do not love him,—you?'

'You're frank at least
In putting questions, madam,' I replied.
'I love my cousin cousinly—no more.'

'I guessed as much. I'm ready to be
frank

In answering also, if you'll question me,
Or even with something less. You stand
outside,

You artist women, of the common sex;
You share not with us, and exceed us so
Perhaps by what you're mulcted in, your
hearts

Being starved to make your heads: so
run the old

Traditions of you. I can therefore
speak,

Without the natural shame which crea-
tures feel

When speaking on their level, to their
like.

There's many a papist she, would rather
die

Than own to her maid she put a ribbon
on

To catch the indifferent eye of such a
man,—

Who yet would count adulteries on her
beads

At holy Mary's shrine and never blush;
Because the saints are so far off, we lose
All modesty before them. Thus, to-day.
'Tis I, love Romney Leigh.'

'Forbear,' I cried.

'If here's no Muse, still less is any saint;
Nor even a friend, that Lady Waldemar
Should make confessions'

'That's unkindly said.

If no friend, what forbids to make a

friend
To join to our confession ere we have
done?

I love your cousin. If it seems unwise
To say so, it's still foolisher (we're
frank)

To feel so. My first husband left me
young,

And pretty enough, so please you, and
rich enough,

To keep my booth in May-fair with the
rest

To happy issues. There are marquises
Would serve seven years to call me wife,
I know;

And, after seven, I might consider it,
For there's some comfort in a marqui-
sate

When all's said,—yes, but after the seven
years;

I, now, love Romney. You put up your lip,
So like a Leigh! so like him!—Pardon me,
I am well aware I do not derogate
I loving Romney Leigh. The name is good,
The means are excellent; but the man;
the man—
Heaven help us both,—I am near as mad
as he,
In loving such an one.'

She slowly wrung
Her heavy ringlets till they touched her smile,
As reasonably sorry for herself;
And thus continued,—

'Of a truth, Miss Leigh,
I have not, without struggle come to this.

I took a master in the German tongue,
I gamed a little, went to Paris twice;
But, after all, this love! . . . you eat of love,

And do as vile a thing as if you ate
Of garlic—which, whatever else you eat,
Tastes uniformly acrid, till your peach
Reminds you of your onion! Am I coarse?

Well, love's coarse, nature's coarse—ah,
there's the rub!

We fair fine ladies, who park out our lives

From common sheep-paths, cannot help the crows

From flying over,—we're as natural still
As Blowsalinda. Drape us perfectly

In Lyons' velvet,—we are not, for that,
Lay-figures, like you: we have hearts within,

Warm, live, improvident, indecent hearts,

As ready for outrageous ends and acts
As any distressed sempstress of them all
That Romney groans and toils for. We catch love

And other fevers, in the vulgar way.
Love will not be outwitted by our wit,
Nor outrun by our equipages:—mine
Persisted, spite of efforts. All my cards
Turned up but Romney Leigh; my German stopped

At germane Wertherism; my Paris rounds

Returned me from the Champs Elysées
just
A ghost, and sighing like Dido's. I came home
Uncured,—convicted rather to myself
Of being in love . . . in love! That's coarse you'll say.
I'm talking garlic.'

Coldly I replied.
'Apologise for atheism, not love!
For me, I do believe in love, and God.
I know my cousin: Lady Waldemar
I know not: yet I say as much as this—
Whoever loves him, let her not excuse
But cleanse herself, that, loving such a man,
She may not do it with such unworthy love

He cannot stoop and take it.'

'That is said
Austerely, like a youthful prophethess,
Who knits her brows across her pretty eyes

To keep them back from following the grey flight

Of doves between the temple-columns.

Dear,
Be kinder with me. Let us two be friends.

I'm a mere woman,—the more weak perhaps

Through being so proud; you're better; as for him,

He's best. Indeed he builds his goodness up

So high, it topples down to the other side,

And makes a sort of badness; there's the worst

I have to say against your cousin's best!
And so be mild, Aurora, with my worst,
For his sake, if not mine.'

'I own myself,
Incredulous of confidence like this
Availing him or you.'

'And I, myself,
Of being worthy of him with any love:
In your sense I am not so—let it pass.
Let that pass too.'

'Pass, pass! we play police
Upon my cousin's life, to indicate
What may or may not pass.' I cried.

'He knows
What's worthy of him; the choice remains with him;

And what he chooses, act or wife, I think

I shall not call unworthy, I, for one.'

'Tis somewhat rashly said,' she answered slow.

'Now let's talk reason, though we talk of love.

Your cousin Romney Leigh's a monster : there,

The word's out fairly ; let me prove the fact.

We'll take, say, that most perfect of antiques

They call the Genius of the Vatican, Which seems too beauteous to endure itself

In this mixed world, and fasten it for once

Upon the torso of the Dancing Fawn, (Who might limp surely, if he did not dance,)

Instead of Buonarroti's mask : what then ?

We show the sort of monster Romney is, With god-like virtue and heroic aims

Subjoined to limping possibilities Of mismade human nature. Grant the man

Twice godlike, twice heroic,—still he limps,

And here's the point we come to.'

But, Lady Waldemar, the point's the thing
'Pardon me,

We never come to.'

'Caustic, insolent
At need ! I like you'—(there, she took my hands)

'And now my lioness, help Androcles, For all your roaring. Help me ! for myself

I would not say so—but for him. He limps

So certainly, he'll fall into the pit A week hence,—so I lose him—so he is lost !

For when he's fairly married, he a Leigh, To a girl of doubtful life, undoubtful birth,

Starved out in London till her coarse-grained hands

Are whiter than her morals,—even you May call his choice unworthy.'

'Married ! lost !
He, . . . Romney !'

'Ah, you're moved at last,' she said.
'These monsters, set out in the open sun,

Of course throw monstrous shadows : those who think

Awry, will scarce act straightly. Who but he ?

And who but you can wonder ? He has been mad,

The whole world knows, since first, a nominal man,

He soured the proctors, tried the gownsmen's wits,

With equal scorn of triangles and wine, And took no honours, yet was honourable.

They'll tell you he lost count of Homer's ships

In Melbourne's poor-bills, Ashley's factory bills.—

Ignored the Aspasia we all dare to praise, For other women, dear, we could not name

Because we're decent. Well, he had some right

On his side probably ; men always have, Who go absurdly wrong. The living boor

Who brews your ale, exceeds in vital worth

Dead Cæsar who 'stops bungholes' in the cask ;

And also, to do good is excellent, For persons of his income, even to boors :

I sympathise with all such things. But he

Went mad upon them . . . madder and more mad,

From college times to these,—as, going down hill,

The faster still, the farther ! you must know

Your Leigh by heart ; he has sown his black young curls

With bleaching cares of half a million men

Already. If you do not starve, or sin, You're nothing to him. Pay the income-tax,

And break your heart upon't . . . he'll scarce be touched ;

But come upon the parish, qualified For the parish stocks, and Romney will be there

To call you brother, sister, or perhaps
A tenderer name still. Had I any chance
With Mister Leigh, who am Lady Wal-
demar,
And never committed felony?’

‘You speak
Too bitterly,’ I said, ‘for the literal
truth.’

‘The truth is bitter. Here’s a man who
looks

For ever on the ground! you must be
low;

Or else a pictured ceiling overhead,
Good painting thrown away. For me,
I’ve done

What women may, we’re somewhat lim-
ited,

We modest women, but I’ve done my
best.

—How men are perjured when they
swear our eyes

Have meaning in them! they’re just
blue or brown,

They just can drop their lids a little.
And yet

Mine did more, for I read half Fourier
through,

Proudhon, Considerant, and Louis
Blanc,

With various other of his socialists;
And if I had been a fathom less in love,

Had cured myself with gaping. As it
was,

I quoted from them prettily enough
Perhaps, to make them sound half rati-
onal

To a saner man than he whene’er we
talked,

(For which I dodged occasion)—learnt
by heart

His speeches in the Commons and else-
where

Upon the social question; heaped re-
ports

Of wicked women and penitentiaries,
On all my tables, with a place for Sue;

And gave my name to swell subscription-
lists

Toward keeping up the sun at night in
heaven,

And other possible ends. All things I
did,

Except the impossible . . . such as wear-
ing gowns

Provided by the Ten Hours’ movement:
there,

I stopped—we must stop somewhere.
He, meanwhile,

Unmoved as the Indian tortoise ’neath
the world,

Let all that noise go on upon his back:
He would not disconcert or throw me

out;
’Twas well to see a woman of my class

With such a dawn of conscience. For
the heart,

Made firewood for his sake, and flaming
up

To his face,—he merely warmed his feet
at it;

But deigned to let my carriage stop him
short

In park or street,—he leaning on the door
With news of the committee which sate

last
On pickpockets at suck.’

‘You jest—you jest.’

‘As martyrs jest, dear, (if you read their
lives)

Upon the axe which kills them. When
all’s done

By me, . . . for him—you’ll ask him pres-
ently

The colour of my hair—he cannot tell,
Or answers ‘dark’ at random,—while,

be sure,
He’s absolute on the figure, five or ten,

Of my last subscription. Is it bearable,
And I a woman?’

‘Is it reparable,

Though I were a man?’
‘I know not. That’s to prove.

But first, this shameful marriage.’

‘Ay?’ I cried,

‘Then really there’s a marriage?’
‘Yesterday

I held him fast upon it. ‘Mister Leigh,’
Said I, ‘shut up a thing, it makes more

noise.
‘The boiling town keeps secrets ill; I’ve

known
‘Yours since last week. Forgive my

knowledge so
‘You feel I’m not the woman of the

world
‘The world thinks; you have borne with
me before

'And used me in your noble work, our
 work,
 'And now you shall not cast me off
 because
 'You're at the difficult point, the *join*.
 'Tis true
 'Even I can scarce admit the cogency
 'Of such a marriage . . . where you do
 not love,
 '(Except the class) yet marry and throw
 your name
 'Down to the gutter, for a fire-escape
 'To future generations! 't is sublime,
 'A great example,—a true Genesis
 'Of the opening social era. But take
 heed;
 'This virtuous act must have a patent
 weight,
 'Or loses half its virtue. Make it tell,
 'Interpret it, and set in the light,
 'And do not muffle it in a winter cloak
 'As a vulgar bit of shame,—as if, at best,
 'A Leigh had made a misalliance and
 blushed
 'A Howard should know it.' Then, I
 pressed him more—
 'He would not choose,' I said, 'that
 even his kin . . .
 'Aurora Leigh, even . . . should conceive
 his act
 'Less sacrifice, more fantasy.' At
 which
 He grew so pale, dear, . . . to the lips I
 knew,
 I had touched him. 'Do you know her,'
 he inquired,
 'My cousin Aurora?' 'Yes,' I said,
 and lied,
 (But truly we all know you by your
 books)
 And so I offered to come straight to
 you,
 Explain the subject, justify the cause,
 And take you with me to St. Margaret's
 Court
 To see this miracle, this Marian Erle,
 This drover's daughter (she's not pretty,
 he swears)
 Upon whose finger, exquisitely pricked
 By a hundred needles, we're to hang the
 tie
 'Twixt class and class in England,—thus
 indeed
 By such a presence, yours and mine, to
 lift

The match up from the doubtful place.
 At once
 He thanked me sighing . . . murmured
 to himself
 'She'll do it perhaps; she's noble,'—
 thanked me, twice,
 And promised, as my guerdon, to put off
 His marriage for a month.'

I answered then.
 'I understand your drift imperfectly.
 You wish to lead me to my cousin's be-
 trothed,
 To touch her hand if worthy, and hold
 her hand
 If feeble, thus to justify his match.
 So be it then. But how this serves your
 ends,
 And how the strange confession of your
 love
 Serves this, I have to learn—I cannot
 see.'

She knit her restless forehead. 'Then,
 despite,
 Aurora, that most radiant morning
 name,
 You're dull as any London afternoon.
 I wanted time,—and gained it,—wanted
 you,
 And gain you! You will come and see
 the girl
 In whose most prodigal eyes the lineal
 pearl
 And pride of all your lofty race of Leighs
 Is destined to solution. Authorised
 By sight and knowledge, then, you'll
 speak your mind,
 And prove to Romney, in your brilliant
 way,
 He'll wrong the people and posterity
 (Say such a thing is bad for me and you,
 And you fail utterly,) by concluding thus
 An execrable marriage. Break it up.
 Disroot it—peradventure presently,
 We'll plant a better fortune in its place.
 Be good to me, Aurora, scorn me less
 For saying the thing I should not. Well
 I know
 I should not. I have kept, as others
 have,
 The iron rule of womanly reserve
 In lip and life, till now: I wept a week
 Before I came here.'—Ending, she was
 pale;

The last words, haughtily said, were tremulous.

This palfrey pranced in harness, arched her neck,

And, only by the foam upon the bit,
You saw she champed against it.

Then I rose.

'I love love: truth's no cleaner thing than love.

I comprehend a love so fiery hot
It burns its natural veil of august shame,
And stands sublimely in the nude, as chaste

As Medicean Venus. But I know,
A love that burns through veils will burn through masks

And shrivel up treachery. What, love and lie!

Nay—go to the opera! your love's curable.'

'I love and lie?' she said—'I lie, forsooth?'

And beat her taper foot upon the floor,
And smiled against the shoe,—'You're hard, Miss Leigh,

Unversed in current phrases,—Bowling-greens

Of poets are fresher than the world's highways;

Forgive me that I rashly blew the dust
Which dims our hedges even, in your eyes,

And vexed you so much. You find, probably,

No evil in this marriage,—rather good
Of innocence, to pastoralise in song:

You'll give the bond your signature, perhaps.

Beneath the lady's mark,—indifferent
That Romney chose a wife, could write

her name,
In witnessing he loved her.'

'Loved!' I cried;

'Who tells you that he wants a wife to love?

He gets a horse to use, not love, I think:
'There's work for wives as well,—and after, straw,

When men are liberal. For myself, you err

Supposing power in me to break this match.

I could not do it to save Romney's life;
And would not, to save mine.'

'You take so it.'

She said; 'farewell then. Write your books in peace,

As far as may be for some secret stir
Now obvious to me,—for, most obviously,

In coming hither I mistook the way.'
Whereat she touched my hand, and bent her head,

And floated from me like a silent cloud
That leaves the sense of thunder.

I drew breath

Oppressed in my deliverance. After all
This woman breaks her social system up
For love, so counted—the love possible
To such,—and lilies are still lilies, pulled
By smutty hands, though spotted from their white;

And thus she is better haply of her kind,
Than Romney Leigh, who lives by diagrams,

And crosses out the spontaneities
Of all his individual, personal life,
With formal universals. As if man
Were set upon a high stool at a desk
To keep God's books for Him in red and black,

And feel by millions! What, if even God

Were chiefly God by living out Himself
To an individualism of the Infinite,
Eterne, intense, profuse,—still throwing up

The golden spray of multitudinous worlds

In measure to the proclive weight and rush

Of His inner nature,—the spontaneous love

Still proof and outflow of spontaneous life?

Then live, Aurora.

Two hours afterward,

Within St. Margaret's Court I stood alone,

Close-veiled. A sick child, from an ague-fit,

Whose wasted right hand gamboled 'gainst his left

With an old brass button in a blot of sun,

Jeered weakly at me as I passed across
The uneven pavement; while a woman, rouged

Upon the angular cheek-bones, kerchief
 torn,
 Thin dangling locks, and flat lascivious
 mouth,
 Cursed at a window both ways, in and
 out,
 By turns some bed-rid creature and my-
 self,—
 ‘Lie still there, mother! liker the dead
 dog
 You’ll be to-morrow. What, we pick
 our way,
 Fine madam, with those damnable small
 feet!
 We cover up our face from doing good,
 As if it were our purse! What brings
 you here,
 My lady? is’t to find my gentleman
 Who visits his tame pigeon in the
 eaves?
 Our cholera catch you with its cramps
 and spasms.
 And tumble up your good clothes, veil
 and all,
 And turn your whiteness dead-blue.’ I
 looked up;
 I think I could have walked through
 hell that day,
 And never flinched. ‘The dear Christ
 comfort you,’
 I said, ‘you must have been most miser-
 able
 To be so cruel,’—and I emptied out
 My purse upon the stones: when, as I
 had cast
 The last charm in the cauldron, the whole
 court
 Went boiling, bubbling up, from all its
 doors
 And windows, with a hideous wail of
 laughs
 And roar of oaths, and blows perhaps . .
 I passed
 Too quickly for distinguishing . . and
 pushed
 A little side-door hanging on a hinge,
 And plunged into the dark, and groped
 and climbed
 The long, steep, narrow stair ’twixt brok-
 en rail
 And mildewed wall that let the plaster
 drop
 To startle me in the blackness. Still,
 up, up!

So high lived Romney’s bride. I paused
 at last
 Before a low door in the roof, and
 knocked;
 There came an answer like a hurried
 dove,
 ‘So soon? can that be Mister Leigh? so
 soon?’
 And as I entered, an ineffable face
 Met mine upon the threshold. ‘Oh, not
 you,
 Not you!’ . . . the dropping of the
 voice implied,
 ‘Then, if not you, for me not any one.’
 I looked her in the eyes, and held her
 hands,
 And said, ‘I am his cousin,—Romney
 Leigh’s;
 And here I’m come to see my cousin
 too.’
 She touched me with her face and with
 her voice,
 This daughter of the people. Such soft
 flowers,
 From such rough roots? the people, un-
 der there,
 Can sin so, curse so, look so, smell so . . .
 laugh!
 Yet have such daughters?
 No wise beautiful
 Was Marian Erle. She was not white
 nor brown,
 But could look either, like a mist that
 changed
 According to being shone on more or
 less.
 The hair, too, ran its opulence of curls
 In doubt ’twixt dark and bright, nor left
 you clear
 To name the colour. Too much hair
 perhaps
 (I’ll name a fault here) for so small a
 head,
 Which seemed to droop on that side and
 on this,
 As a full-blown rose uneasy with its
 weight
 Though not a wind should trouble it.
 Again,
 The dimple in the cheek had better
 gone
 With redder, fuller rounds: and some-
 what large
 The mouth was, though the milky little
 teeth

Dissolved it to so infantine a smile.
 For soon it smiled at me; the eyes
 smiled too,
 But 'twas as if remembering they had
 wept,
 And knowing they should, some day,
 weep again.

We talked. She old me all her story out,
 Which I'll re-tell with fuller utterance,
 As coloured and confirmed in aftertimes
 By others and herself too. Marian
 Erle

Was born upon the ledge of Malvern
 Hill

To eastward, in a hut built up at night
 To evade the landlord's eye, of mud and
 turf,

Still liable, if once he looked that way,
 To being straight levelled, scattered by
 his foot,

Like any other anthill. Born, I say;
 God sent her to His world, commissioned
 right,

Her human testimonials fully signed,
 Not scant in soul—complete in linea-
 ments:

But others had to swindle her a place
 To wail in when she had come. No
 place for her,

By man's law! born an outlaw, was this
 babe.

Her first cry in our strange and strang-
 ling air,

When cast in spasms out by the shudder-
 ing womb,

Was wrong against the social code,—
 forced wrong.

What business had the baby to cry
 there?

I tell her story and grow passionate.
 She, Marian, did not tell it so, but used
 Meek words that made no wonder of
 herself

For being so sad a creature. 'Mister
 Leigh

Considered truly that such things should
 change.

They *will*, in heaven—but meantime, on
 the earth,

There's none can like a nettle as a pink,
 Except himself. We're nettles, some
 of us,

And give offence by the act of springing
 up;

And, if we leave the damp side of the
 wall,

The hoës, of course, are on us.' So she
 said.

Her father earned his life by random
 jobs

Despised by steadier workmen—keeping
 swine

On commons, picking hops, or hurrying
 on

The harvest at wet seasons,—or, at need,
 Assisting the Welsh drovers, when a
 drove

Of startled horses plunged into the mist
 Below the mountain-road, and sowed the
 wind

With wandering neighings. In between
 the gaps

Of such irregular work, he drank and
 slept,

And cursed his wife because, the pence
 being out,

She could not buy more drink. At
 which she turned

(The worm) and beat her baby in re-
 venge

For her own broken heart. 'There's not
 a crime

But takes it's proper change out still in
 crime,

If once rung on the counter of this
 world;

Let sinners look to it.

Yet the outcast child,
 For whom the very mother's face fore-
 went

The mother's special patience, lived and
 grew;

Learnt early to cry low, and walk alone,
 With that pathetic vacillating roll

Of the infant body on the uncertain feet,
 (The earth being felt unstable ground so
 soon)

At which most women's arms uncloze at
 once

With irrepressive instinct. Thus, at
 three,

This poor weaned kid would run off from
 the fold,

This babe would steal off from the moth-
 er's chair,

And, creeping through the golden walls
 of gorse,

Would find some keyhole toward the se-
 crecy
 Of Heaven's high blue, and, nestling
 down, peer out—
 Oh, not to catch the angels at their
 games,
 She had never heard of angels,—but to
 gaze
 She knew not why, to see she knew not
 what,
 A-hungering outward from the barren
 earth
 For something like a joy. She liked, she
 said,
 To dazzle black her sight against the
 sky,
 For then, it seemed, some grand blind
 Love came down,
 And groped her out, and clasped her
 with a kiss;
 She learnt God that way, and was beat
 for it
 Whenever she went home,—yet came
 again,
 As surely as the trapped hare, getting
 free,
 Returns to his form. This grand blind
 Love, she said,
 This skyeey father and mother both in
 one,
 Instructed her and civilised her more
 Than even Sunday-school did afterward,
 To which a lady sent her to learn books,
 And sit upon a long bench in a row
 With other children. Well, she laughed
 sometimes
 To see them laugh and laugh and maul
 their texts;
 But after she was sorrowful with noise,
 And wondered if their mothers beat them
 hard
 That ever they should laugh so. There
 was one
 She loved indeed,—Rose Bell, a seven
 years' child,
 So pretty and clever, who read syllables
 When Marian was at letters; *she* would
 laugh
 At nothing—hold your finger up, she
 laughed,
 Then shook her curls down over eyes
 and mouth
 To hide her make-mirth from the school-
 master.
 And Rose's pelting glee, as frank as rain

On cherry-blossoms, brightened Marian
 too,
 To see another merry whom she loved.
 She whispered once (the children side by
 side,
 With mutual arms entwined about their
 necks)
 'Your mother lets you laugh so?' 'Ay,'
 said Rose,
 'She lets me. She was dug into the
 ground
 Six years since, I being but a yearling
 wean.
 Such mothers let us play and lose our
 time,
 And never scold nor beat us! don't you
 wish
 You had one like that?' 'There, Marian
 breaking off
 Looked suddenly in my face. 'Poor
 Rose,' said she,
 'I heard her laugh last night in Oxford
 Street.
 I'd pour out half my blood to stop that
 laugh.
 Poor Rose, poor Rose!' said Marian.
 She resumed.
 It tried her, when she had learnt at
 Sunday-school
 What God was, what he wanted from us
 all,
 And how in choosing sin we vexed the
 Christ,
 To go straight home and hear her father
 pull
 The name down on us from the thunder
 shelf,
 Then drink away his soul into the dark
 From seeing judgment. Father, mother,
 home,
 Were God and heaven reversed to her:
 the more
 She knew of Right, the more she guessed
 their wrong.
 Her price paid down for knowlegde, was
 to know
 The vileness of her kindred: through
 her heart,
 Her filial and tormented heart, hence-
 forth,
 They struck their blows at virtue. Oh,
 'tis hard
 To learn you have a father up in heaven
 By a gathering certain sense of being,
 on earth,

Still worse than orphaned: 'tis too heavy
a grief,
The having to thank God for such a joy!

And so passed Marian's life from year to
year.

Her parents took her with them when
they tramped,

Dodged lanes and heaths, frequented
towns and fairs,

And once went farther and saw Man-
chester,

And once the sea, that blue end of the
world,

That fair scroll-finis of a wicked book,—
And twice a prison, back at intervals,

Returning to the hills. Hills draw like
heaven,

And stronger sometimes, holding out
their hands

To pull you from the vile flats up to
them;

And though perhaps these strollers still
strolled back,

As sheep do, simply that they knew the
way,

They certainly felt bettered unaware
Emerging from the social smut of towns

To wipe their feet clean on the mountain-
turf.

In which long wanderings, Marian lived
and learned,

Endured and learned. The people on
the roads

Would stop and ask her how her eyes
outgrew

Her cheeks, and if she meant to lodge
the birds

In all that hair; and then they lifted her,
The miller in his cart, a mile or twain,

The butcher's boy on horseback. Often
too

The pedlar stopped, and tapped her on
the head

With absolute forefinger, brown and
ringed,

And asked if peradventure she could
read;

And when she answered 'ay,' would toss
her down

Some stray odd volume from his heavy
pack,

A Thomson's Seasons, mulcted of the
Spring,

Or half a play of Shakspeare's, torn
across:

(She had to guess the bottom of a page
By just the top sometimes,—as difficult,
As, sitting on the moon, to guess the
earth!)

Or else a sheaf of leaves (for that small
Ruth's

Small gleanings) torn out from the heart
of books,

From Churchyard Elegies and Edens
Lost,

From Burns, and Bunyan, Selkirk, and
Tom Jones.

'Twas somewhat hard to-keep the things
distinct,

And oft the jangling influence jarred the
child

Like looking at a sunset full of grace
Through a pothouse window while the

drunken oaths
Went on behind her; but she weeded
out

Her book-leaves, threw away the leaves
that hurt,

(First tore them small, that none should
find a word)

And made a nosegay of the sweet and
good

To fold within her breast, and pore upon
At broken moments of the noontide

glare,
When leave was given her to untie her

cloak
And rest upon the dusty highway's bank

From the road's dust. Or oft, the jour-
ney done,

Some city friend would lead her by the
hand

To hear a lecture at an institute:
And thus she had grown, this Marian

Erle of ours,
To no book-learning,—she was ignorant

Of authors,—not in earshot of the things
Out-spoken o'er the heads of common

men
By men who are uncommon,—but with-
in

The cadenced hum of such, and capable
Of catching from the fringes of the wind

Some fragmentary phrases, here and
there,

Of that fine music,—which, being carried
in

To her soul, had reproduced itself afresh

In finer motions of the lips and lids.

She said, in speaking of it, 'if a flower
Were thrown you out of heaven at intervals,

You'd soon attain to a trick of looking
up,—

And so with her.' She counted me her
years,

Till I felt old; and then she counted me
Her sorrowful pleasures, till I felt
ashamed.

She told me she was fortunate and calm
On such and such a season; sate and
sewed;

With no one to break up her crystal
thoughts;

While rhymes from lovely poems span
around

Their ringing circles of ecstatic tune,
Beneath the moistened finger of the
Hour.

Her parents called her a strange, sickly
child,

Not good for much, and given to sulk
and stare,

And smile into the hedges and the clouds,
And tremble if one shook her from her
fit

By any blow or word even. Out-door
jobs

Went ill with her; and household quiet
work

She was not born to. Had they kept
the north,

They might have had their pennyworth
out of her

Like other parents, in the factories:
(Your children work for you, not you for
them,

Or else they better had been choked with
air

The first breath drawn;) but, in this
tramping life,

Was nothing to be done with such a
child

But tramp and tramp. And yet she
knitted hose

Not ill, and was not dull at needlework;
And all the country people gave her
pence

For darning stockings past their natural
age,

And patching petticoats from old to new,

And other light work done for thrifty
wives.

One day, said Marian,—the sun shone
that day—

Her mother had been badly beat, and
felt

The bruises sore about her wretched
soul,

(That must have been:) she came in
suddenly,

And snatching in a sort of breathless
rage

Her daughter's headgear comb, let down
the hair

Upon her like a sudden waterfall
Then drew her drenched and passive by
the arm

Outside the hut they lived in. When
the child

Could clear her blinded face from all that
stream

Of tresses . . . there, a man stood, with
beasts' eyes

That seemed as they would swallow her
alive

Complete in body and spirit, hair and
all,—

With burning stertorous breath that
hurt her cheek,

He breathed so near. The mother held
her tight,

Saying hard between her teeth—'Why
wench, why wench,

The squire speaks to you now—the
squire's too good;

He means to set you up, and comfort
us.

Be mannerly at least.' The child turned
round

And looked up piteous in the mother's
face,

(Be sure that mother's death-bed will
not want

Another devil to damn, than such a
look)

'Oh, mother!' then, with desperate
glance to heaven,

'God, free me from my mother,' she
shrieked out,

'These mothers are too dreadful.' And,
with force

As passionate as fear, she tore her hands
Like lilies from the rocks, from hers and
his,

And sprang down, bounded headlong
 down the steep,
 Away from both—away, if possible,
 As far as God,—away! They yelled at
 her,
 As famished hounds at a hare. She
 heard them yell,
 She felt her name hiss after her from the
 hills,
 Like shot from guns. On, on. And
 now she had cast
 The voices off with the uplands. On.
 Mad fear
 Was running in her feet and killing the
 ground;
 The white roads curled as if she burnt
 them up,
 The green fields melted, wayside trees
 fell back
 To make room for her. Then her head
 grew vexed,
 Trees, fields, turned on her and ran after
 her;
 She heard the quick pants of the hills
 behind,
 Their keen air pricked her neck. She
 had lost her feet,
 Could run no more, yet somehow went
 as fast,
 The horizon red 'twixt steeples in the
 east
 So sucked her forward, forward, while
 her heart
 Kept swelling, swelling, till it swelled so
 big
 It seemed to fill her body; when it burst
 And overflowed the world and swamped
 the light,
 'And now I am dead and safe,' thought
 Marian Erle—
 She had dropped, she had fainted.
 As the sense returned,
 The night had passed—not life's night.
 She was 'ware
 Of heavy tumbling motions, creaking
 wheels,
 The driver shouting to the lazy team
 That swung their rankling bells against
 her brain;
 While, through the waggon's coverture
 and chinks,
 The cruel yellow morning pecked at her
 Alive or dead upon the straw inside,—
 At which her soul ached back into the
 dark

And prayed, 'no more of that.' A wag-
 goner
 Had found her in a ditch beneath the
 moon,
 As white as moonshine save for the ooz-
 ing blood.
 At first he thought her dead; but when
 he had wiped
 The mouth and heard it sigh, he raised
 her up,
 And laid her in his waggon in the straw,
 And so conveyed her to the distant town
 To which his business called himself, and
 left
 That heap of misery at the hospital.

She stirred;—the place seemed new and
 strange as death.
 The white strait bed, with others strait
 and white,
 Like graves dug side by side at measured
 lengths,
 And quiet people walking in and out
 With wonderful low voices and soft steps
 And appositional equal care for each,
 Astonished her with order, silence, law:
 And when a gentle hand held out a cup,
 She took it, as you do at sacrament,
 Half awed, half melted,—not being used.
 indeed,
 To so much love as makes the form of
 love
 And courtesy of manners. Delicate
 drinks
 And rare white bread, to which some
 dying eyes
 Were turned in observation. O my
 God,
 How sick we must be, ere we make men
 just!
 I think it frets the saints in heaven to
 see
 How many desolate creatures on the
 earth
 Have learned the simple dues of fellow-
 ship
 And social comfort, in a hospital,
 As Marian did. She lay there, stunned,
 half tranced,
 And wished, at intervals of growing
 sense,
 She might be sicker yet, if sickness
 made
 The world so marvellous kind, the air so
 hushed,

And all her wake-time quiet as a sleep ;
For now she understood, (as such things
were)

How sickness ended very oft in heaven
Among the unspoken raptures. Yet
more sick,

And surelier happy. Then she dropped
her lids,

And, folding up her hands as flowers at
night,

Would lose no moment of the blessed
time.

She lay and seethed in fever many
weeks :

But youth was strong and overcame the
test :

Revolted soul and flesh were reconciled
And fetched back to the necessary day
And daylight duties. She could creep
about

The long bare rooms, and stare out
drearily

From any narrow window on the street,
Till some one, who had nursed her as a
friend

Said coldly to her, as an enemy,
'She had leave to go next week, being
well enough,'

While only her heart ached. 'Go next
week,' thought she,

'Next week ! how would it be with her
next week,

Let out into that terrible street alone
Among the pushing people, . . to go . .
where ?

One day, the last before the dreaded last,
Among the convalescents, like herself
Prepared to go next morning, she sate
dumb,

And heard half absently the women talk,
How one was famished for her baby's
cheeks—

'The little wretch would know her ! a
year old

And lively, like his father !' one was
keen

To get to work, and fill some clamorous
mouths ;

And one was tender for he dear good-
man

Who had missed her sorely,—and one,
querulous . .

'Would pay backbiting neighbours who
had dared

To talk about her as already dead,'—

And one was proud . . 'and if her
sweetheart Luke

Had left her for a ruddier face than
hers,

(The gossip would be seen through at a
glance)

Sweet riddance of such sweethearts—let
him hang !

'Twere good to have been as sick for
such an end.'

And while they talked, and Marian felt
the worse

For having missed the worst of all their
wrongs,

A visitor was ushered through the wards
And paused among the talkers. 'When
he looked

It was as if he spoke, and when he spoke
He sang perhaps,' said Marian ; 'could
she tell ?

She only knew (so much she had chron-
icled,

As seraphs might the making of the sun)
That he who came and spake, was
Romney Leigh,

And then, and there, she saw and heard
him first.'

And when it was her turn to have the
face

Upon her,—all those buzzing pallid lips
Being satisfied with comfort—when he
changed

To Marian, saying, 'And *you* ? you're
going, where ?'—

She, moveless as a worm beneath a
stone

Which some one's stumbling foot has
turned aside,

Writhed suddenly, astonished with the
light,

And breaking into sobs cried, 'Where I
go ?

None asked me till this moment. Can I
say

Where I go ? when it has not seemed
worth while

To God himself, who thinks of every
one,

To think of me, and fix where I shall
go ?'

'So young,' he gently asked her, 'you have lost

Your father and your mother?'

Both,' she said,

'Both lost I my father was burnt up with gin

Or ever I sucked milk, and so is lost.

My mother sold me to a man last month,

And so my mother's lost, 'tis manifest.

And I, who fled from her for miles and miles,

As if I had caught sight of the fire of hell
Through some wild gap, (she was my mother, sir)

It seems I shall be lost too, presently,

And so we end, all three of us.'

'Poor child!'

He said,—with such a pity in his voice,

It soothed her more than her own tears,

—'poor child

'Tis simple that betrayal by mother's love

Should bring despair of God's too. Yet be taught

He's better to us than many mothers are,

And children cannot wander beyond reach

Of the sweep of his white raiment.
Touch and hold

And if you weep still, weep where John was laid

While Jesus loved him.'

She could say the words,
She told me, 'exactly as he uttered them
A year back, . . . since in any doubt or dark

They came out like the stars, and shone on her

With just their comfort. Common words, perhaps

The ministers in church might say the same;

But *he*, he made the church with what he spoke,—

The difference was the miracle,' said she.

Then catching up her smile to ravishment,

She added quickly, 'I repeat his words,
But not his tones: can any one repeat
The music of an organ, out of church?

And when he said 'poor child,' I shut my eyes

To feel how tenderly his voice broke through,

As the ointment-box broke on the Holy feet

To let out the rich medicative nard.'

She told me how he had raised and rescued her

With reverent pity, as, in touching grief,

He touched the wounds of Christ,—and made her feel

More self-respecting. Hope, he called, belief

In God,—work, worship . . . therefore let us pray!

And thus, to snatch her soul from atheism,

And keep it stainless from her mother's face,

He sent her to a famous sempstress-house

Far off in London, there to work and hope.

With that they parted. She kept sight of Heaven,

But not of Romney. He had good to do

To others: through the days and through the nights

She sewed and sewed and sewed. She drooped sometimes,

And wondered, while along the tawny light

She struck the new thread into her needle's eye,

How people without mothers on the hills

Could choose the town to live in!—then she drew

The stitch, and mused how Romney's face would look

And if 'twere likely he'd remember her's,

When they too had their meeting after death.

FOURTH BOOK.

THEY met still sooner. 'Twas a year from thence

When Lucy Gresham, the sick sempstress girl,

Who sewed by Marian's chair so still and quick,

And leant her head upon its back to
 cough
 More freely when, the mistress turning
 round,
 The others took occasion to laugh out,
 Gave up at last. Among the workers,
 spoke
 A bold girl with black eyebrows and red
 lips,
 'You know the news? Who's dying, do
 you think?
 Our Lucy Gresham. I expected it
 As little as Nell Hart's wedding. Blush
 not, Nell,
 Thy curls be red enough without thy
 cheeks;
 And, some day, there'll be found a man
 to dote
 On red curls.—Lucy Gresham swooned
 last night,
 Dropped sudden in the street while going
 home;
 And now the baker says, who took her
 up
 And laid her by her grandmother in bed,
 He'll give her a week to die in. Pass
 the silk.
 Let's hope he gave her a loaf too, within
 reach,
 For otherwise they'll starve before they
 die,
 That funny pair of bedfellows! Miss
 Bell,
 I'll thank you for the scissors. The old
 crone
 Is paralytic—that's the reason why
 Our Lucy's thread went faster than her
 breath,
 Which went too quick, we all know.
 Marian Erle!
 Why, Marian Erle, you're not the fool
 to cry?
 Your tears spoil Lady Waldemar's new
 dress,
 You piece of pity!'

Marian rose up straight,
 And, breaking through the talk and
 through the work,
 Went outward, in the face of their sur-
 prise,
 To Lucy's home, to nurse her back to
 life
 Or down to death. She knew, by such
 an act

All place and grace were forfeit in the
 house,
 Whose mistress would supply the miss-
 ing hand
 With necessary, not inhuman haste,
 And take no blame. But pity, too, had
 dues;
 She could not leave a solitary soul
 To founder in the dark, while she sate
 still
 And lavished stitches on a lady's hem
 As if no other work were paramount.
 'Why, God,' thought Marian, 'has a
 missing hand
 This moment; Lucy wants a drink, per-
 haps.
 Let others miss me! never miss me,
 God!'

So Marian sat by Lucy's bed content
 With duty, and was strong, for recom-
 pense,
 To hold the lamp of human love arm-
 high
 To catch the death-strained eyes and
 comfort them,
 Until the angels, on the luminous side
 Of death, had got theirs ready. And she
 said,
 When Lucy thanked her sometimes,
 called her kind,
 It touched her strangely. 'Marian Erle
 called kind!
 What, Marian, beaten and sold, who
 could not die!
 'Tis verily good fortune to be kind.
 Ah, you,' she said, 'who are born to
 such a grace,
 Be sorry for the unlicensed class, the
 poor,
 Reduced to think the best good fortune
 means
 That others, simply, should be kind to
 them.'

From sleep to sleep while Lucy slid
 away
 So gently, like a light upon a hill,
 Of which none names the moment that
 it goes
 Though all see when 'tis gone,—a man
 came in
 And stood beside the bed. The old idiot
 wretch
 Screamed feebly, like a baby overlain,

'Sir, sir, you won't mistake me for the corpse?

Don't look at *me*, sir! never bury *me*! Although I lie here I'm as live as you, Except my legs and arms,—I eat and drink,

And understand,—(that you're the gentleman

Who fits the funerals up, Heaven speed you, sir,)

And certainly I should be livelier still If Lucy here . . . sir, Lucy is the corpse . . .

Had worked more properly to buy me wine:

But Lucy, sir, was always slow at work, I shan't lose much by Lucy. Marian Erle,

Speak up and show the gentleman the corpse.'

And then a voice said, 'Marian Erle.' She rose:

It was the hour for angels—there, stood hers!

She scarcely marvelled to see Romney Leigh.

As light November snows to empty nests,

As grass to graves, as moss to mildewed stones,

As July suns to ruins, through the rents,

As ministering spirits to mourners, through a loss,

As Heaven itself to men, through pangs of death

He came uncalled wherever grief had come.

'And so,' said Marian Erle, 'we met anew,'

And added softly, 'so, we shall not part.' He was not angry that she had left the house

Wherein he placed her. Well—she had feared it might

Have vexed him. Also, when he found her set

On keeping, though the dead was out of sight,

That half-dead, half-live body left behind

With cankerous heart and flesh,—which took your best

And cursed you for the little good it did,

(Could any leave the bed-ridden wretch alone,

So joyless she was thankless even to God,

Much more to you?) he did not say 'twas well,

Yet Marian thought he did not take it ill,—

Since day by day he came, and every day

She felt within his utterance and his eyes A closer, tenderer presence of the soul,

Until at last he said, 'We shall not part.'

On that same day, was Marian's work complete:

She had smoothed the empty bed, and swept the floor

Of coffin sawdust, set the chairs anew The dead had ended gossip in, and stood

In that poor room so cold and orderly, The door-key in her hand, prepared to go

As *they* had, howbeit not their way. He spoke.

'Dear Marian, of one clay God made us all,

And though men push and poke and paddle in't

(As children play at fashioning dirt-pies) And call their fancies by the name of facts,

Assuming difference, lordship, privilege, When all's plain dirt,—they come back to it at last;

The first grave digger proves it with a spade,

And pass all even. Need we wait for this,

You, Marian, and I, Romney?'

She, at that,

Looked blindly in his face, as when one looks

Through driving autumn-rains to find the sky.

He went on speaking.

'Marian, I being born What men call noble, and you, issued from

The noble people,—though the tyrannous sword

Which pierced Christ's heart, has cleft
 the world in twain
 'Twixt class and class, opposing rich to
 poor,
 Shall *we* keep parted? Not so. Let
 us lean
 And strain together rather, each to each,
 Compress the red lips of this gaping
 wound,
 As far as two souls can,—ay, lean and
 league,
 I, from my superabundance,—from your
 want
 You,—joining in a protest 'gainst the
 wrong
 On both sides !'

All the rest, he held her hand
 In speaking, which confused the sense of
 much;
 Her heart against his words beat out so
 thick,
 They might as well be written on the
 dust

Where some poor bird, escaping from
 hawk's beak,
 Has dropped and beats its shuddering
 wings,—the lines
 Are rubbed so,—yet 'twas something like
 to this,
 —That they two, standing at the two
 extremes

Of social classes, had received one seal,
 Been dedicate and drawn beyond them-
 selves

To mercy and ministration,—he, indeed,
 Through what he knew, and she, through
 what she felt,

He, by man's conscience, she, by wo-
 man's heart,
 Relinquishing their several 'vantage
 posts

Of wealthy ease and honourable toil,
 To work with God at love. And since
 God willed

That putting out his hand to touch this
 ark,

He found a woman's hand there, he'd
 accept

The sign too, hold the tender fingers
 fast,

And say, 'My fellow-worker, be my
 wife !'

She told the tale with simple, rustic
 turns,—

Strong leaps of meaning in her sudden
 eyes

That took the gaps of any imperfect
 phrase

Of the unschooled speaker: I have rather
 writ

The thing I understood so, than the
 thing

I heard so. And I cannot render right
 Her quick gesticulation, wild yet soft,
 Self-startled from the habitual mood she
 used,

Half sad, half languid,—like dumb crea-
 tures (now

A rustling bird, and now a wandering
 deer,

Or squirrel 'gainst the oak-gloom flash-
 ing up

His sidelong burnished head, in just her
 way

Of savage spontaneity.) that stir
 Abruptly the green silence of the woods,
 And make it stranger, holier, more pro-
 found;

As Nature's general heart confessed itself
 Of life, and then fell backward on re-
 pose.

I kissed the lips that ended.—'So in-
 deed

He loves you, Marian?'

'Loves me !' She looked up
 With a child's wonder when you ask
 him first

Who made the sun—a puzzled blush,
 that grew,

Then broke off in a rapid radiant smile
 Of sure solution. 'Loves me ! he loves
 all,—

And me, of course. He had not asked
 me else

To work with him for ever and be his
 wife.'

Her words reproved me. This perhaps
 was love—

To have its hands too full of gifts to
 give,

For putting out a hand to take a gift ;
 To love so much, the perfect round of
 love

Includes, in strict conclusion, being
 loved ;

As Eden-dew went up and fell again,
 Enough for watering Eden. Obviously

She had not thought about his love at all :

The cataracts of her soul had poured themselves,

And risen self-crowned in rainbow ; would she ask

Who crowned her ?—it sufficed that she was crowned.

With women of my class, 'tis otherwise :
We haggle for the small change of our gold,

And so much love accord for so much love,

Rialto-prices. Are we therefore wrong ?
If marriage be a contract, look to it then,
Contracting parties should be equal,
just ;

But if, a simple fealty on one side,
A mere religion,—right to give, is all,
And certain brides of Europe duly ask
To mount the pile as Indian widows do,
The spices of their tender youth heaped up,

The jewels of their gracious virtues worn,

More gems, more glory,—to consume entire

For a living husband : as the man's alive,

Not dead, the woman's duty by so much,

Advanced in England beyond Hindostan.

I sate there musing, till she touched my hand

With hers, as softly as a strange white bird

She feared to startle in touching. ' You are kind.

But are you, peradventure, vexed at heart

Because your cousin takes me for a wife ?
I know I am not worthy—nay, in truth,
I'm glad on't, since, for that, he chooses me.

He likes the poor things of the world the best ;

I would not therefore, if I could, be rich.

It pleasures him to stoop for buttercups ;
I would not be a rose upon the wall

A queen might stop at, near the palace-door,

To say to a courtier, ' Pluck that rose for me,

' It's prettier than the rest.' O Romney Leigh !

I'd rather far be trodden by his foot,
Than lie in a great queen's bosom.'

Out of breath

She paused.

' Sweet Marian, do you disavow
The roses with that face ?'

She dropt her head,
As if the wind had caught that flower of her,

And bent it in the garden,—then looked up

With grave assurance. ' Well, you think me bold !

But so we all are, when we're praying God.

And if I'm bold—yet, lady, credit me,
That, since I know myself for what I am,

Much fitter for his handmaid than his wife,

I'll prove the handmaid and the wife at once,

Serve tenderly, and love obediently,
And be a worthier mate, perhaps, than some

Who are wooed in silk among their learned books ;

While I shall set myself to read his eyes,
Till such grow plainer to me than the French

To wisest ladies. Do you think I'll miss
A letter, in the spelling of his mind ?

No more than they do when they sit and write

Their flying words with flickering wild-fowl tails,

Nor ever pause to ask how many *ts*,

Should that be *y* or *z*—they know't so well :

I've seen them writing, when I brought a dress

And waited,—floating out their soft white hands

On shining paper. But they're hard sometimes,

For all those hands !—we've used out many nights,

And worn the yellow daylight into shreds
Which flapped and shivered down our aching eyes

Till night appeared more tolerable, just

That pretty ladies might look beautiful,
Who said at last . . . 'You're lazy in that
house !

'You're slow in sending home the work,
—I count

'I've waited near an hour for't.' Pardon
me,

I do not blame them, madam, nor mis-
prize ;

'They are fair and gracious ; ay, but not
like you,

Since none but you has Mr. Leigh's own
blood

Both noble and gentle,—and without
it . . . well,

They are fair, I said ; so fair, it scarce
seems strange

That, flashing out in any looking-glass
The wonder of their glorious brows and
breasts,

'They are charmed so, they forget to look
behind

And mark how pale we've grown, we
pitiful

Remainders of the world. And so per-
haps

If Mister Leigh had chosen a wife from
these,

She might . . . although he's better than
her best,

And dearly she would know it . . . steal
a thought

Which should be all his, an eye-glance
from his face,

To plunge into the mirror opposite
In search of her own beauty's pearl ;

while I . . .

Ah, dearest lady, serge will outweigh
silk

For winter-wear when bodies feel a-cold,
And I'll be a true wife to your cousin
Leigh.'

Before I answered he was there himself.
I think he had been standing in the
room

And listened probably to half her talk,
Arrested, turned to stone,—as white as
stone.

Will tender sayings make men look so
white ?

He loves her then profoundly.

'You are here,
Aurora? Here I meet you!'—We
clasped hands.

'Even so, dear Romney. Lady Walde-
mar

Has sent me in haste to find a cousin of
mine

Who shall be.'

'Lady Waldemar is good.'

'Here's one, at least, who is good,' I
sighed, and touched

Poor Marian's happy head, as, doglike
she

Most passionately patient, waited on,
A-tremble for her turn of greeting words ;

'I've sat a full hour with your Marian
Erle,

And learnt the thing by heart,—and,
from my heart,

Am therefore competent to give you
thanks

For such a cousin.'

'You accept at last
A gift from me, Aurora, without scorn ?

At last I please you?'—How his voice
was changed !

'You cannot please a woman against her
will,

And once you vexed me. Shall we
speak of that ?

We'll say, then, you were noble in it all
And I not ignorant—let it pass. And
now

You please me, Romney, when you
please yourself ;

So, please you, be fanatical in love,
And I'm well pleased. Ah, cousin ! at
the old hall,

Among the gallery portraits of our
Leighs,

We shall not find a sweeter signory
Than this pure forehead's.'

Not a word he said.

How arrogant men are !—Even philan-
thropists,

Who try to take a wife up in the way
They put down a subscription-cheque,—
if once

She turns and says, 'I will not tax you
so,

Most charitable sir,'—feel ill at ease,
As though she had wronged them some-
how. I suppose

We woman should remember what we
are,

And not throw back an obolus inscribed

With Cæsar's image, lightly. I resumed.

'It strikes me, some of those sublime Vandykes

Were not too proud to make good saints in heaven ;

And if so, then they're not too proud to-day

To bow down (now the ruffs are off their necks)

And own this good, true, noble Marian, . . yours,

And mine, I'll say !—For poets (bear the word)

Half-poets even, are still whole democrats,—

Oh, not that we're disloyal to the high, But loyal to the low, and cognisant

Of the less scrutable majesties. For me, I comprehend your choice—I justify

Your right in choosing.'

'No, no, no,' he sighed, With a sort of melancholy impatient scorn,

As some grown man, who never had a child,

Puts by some child who plays at being a man,

—'You did not, do not, cannot comprehend

My choice, my ends, my motives, nor myself:

No matter now—we'll let it pass, you say.

I thank you for your generous cousinship

Which helps this present ; I accept for her

Your favourable thoughts. We're fallen on days,

We two who are not poets, when to wed Requires less mutual love than common

love,

For two together to bear out at once Upon the loveless many. Work in

pairs,

In galley-couplings or in marriage-rings, The difference lies in the honour, not the

work,—

And such we're bound to, I and she. But love,

(You poets are benighted in this age ; The hour's too late for catching even moths,

You've gnats instead,) love !—love's fool-paradise

Is out of date, like Adam's. Set a swan To swim the Trenton, rather than true

love

To float its fabulous plumage safely down

The cataracts of this loud transition-time,—

Whose roar, for ever henceforth in my ears

Must keep me deaf to music.'

There, I turned And kissed poor Marian, out of discontent.

The man had baffled, chafed me, till I flung

For refuge to the woman,—as, sometimes,

Impatient of some crowded room's close smell,

You throw a window open and lean out To breathe a long breath in the dewy

night

And cool your angry forehead. She, at least,

Was not built up as walls are, brick by brick ;

Each fancy squared, each feeling ranged by line,

The very heat of burning youth applied To indurate forms and systems ! excellent

bricks,

A well-built wall,—which stops you on the road,

And, into which, you cannot see an inch Although you beat your head against it

—pshaw !

'Adieu,' I said, 'for this time, cousins both ;

And, cousin Romney, pardon me the word,

Be happy !—oh, in some esoteric sense Of course !—I mean no harm in wishing

well.

Adieu, my Marian :—may she come to me,

Dear Romney, and be married from my house ?

It is not part of your philosophy To keep your bird upon the blackthorn ?'

'Ay,' He answered, 'but it is :—I take my wife

Directly from the people,—and she
comes
As Austria's daughter to imperial France,
Betwixt her eagles, blinking not her
race,
From Margaret's Court at garret-height,
to meet
And wed me at St. James's, nor put off
Her gown of serge for that. The things
we do,
We do: we'll wear no mask, as if we
blushed.'

'Dear Romney, you're the poet,' I re-
plied,
But felt my smile too mournful for my
word,
And turned and went. Ay, masks, I
thought,—beware
Of tragic masks we tie before the glass,
Uplifted on the cothurn half a yard
Above the natural stature! we would
play
Heroic parts to ourselves,—and end,
perhaps,
As impotently as Athenian wives
Who shrieked in fits at the Eumenides.

His foot pursued me down the stair.
'At least,
You'll suffer me to walk with you beyond
These hideous streets, these graves,
where men alive,
Packed close with earthworms, burr un-
consciously
About the plague that slew them; let
me go.
The very women pelt their souls in mud
At any woman who walks here alone.
How came you here alone?—you are
ignorant.'

We had a strange and melancholy walk:
The night came drizzling downward in
dark rain;
And, as we walked, the colour of the
time,
The act, the presence, my hand upon his
arm,
His voice in my ear, and mine to my
own sense,
Appeared unnatural. We talked modern
books,
And daily papers; Spanish marriage-
schemes,

And English climate—was't so cold last
year?
And will the wind change by to-morrow
morn?
Can Guizot stand? is London full? is
trade
Competitive? has Dickens turned his
hinge
A pinch upon the fingers of the great?
And are potatoes to grow mythical
Like moly? will the apple die out too?
Which way is the wind to-night? south-
east? due east?
We talked on fast, while every common
word
Seemed tangled with the thunder at one
end,
And ready to pull down upon our heads
A terror out of sight. And yet to pause
Were surelier mortal: we tore greedily
up
All silence, all the innocent breathing-
points,
As if, like pale conspirators in haste,
We tore up papers where our signatures
Imperilled us to an ugly shame or death.

I cannot tell you why it was. 'Tis plain
We had not loved nor hated: wherefore
dread
To spill gunpowder on ground safe from
fire?
Perhaps we had lived too closely, to di-
verge
So absolutely: leave two clocks, they
say,
Wound up to different hours, upon one
shelf,
And slowly, through the interior wheels
of each,
The blind mechanic motion sets itself
A-throb to feel out for the mutual time.
It was not so with us, indeed. While
he
Struck midnight, I kept striking six at
dawn,
While he marked judgment, I, redemp-
tion-day;
And such exception to a general law,
Imperious upon inert matter even,
Might make us, each to either, insecure.
A beckoning mystery or a troubling fear.

I mind me, when we parted at the door,

How strange his good-night sounded,—
 like good-night
 Beside a deathbed, where the morrow's
 sun
 Is sure to come too late for more good
 days.
 And all that night I thought . . . 'Good-
 night,' said he.

And so, a month passed. Let me set it
 down
 At once,—I have been wrong, I have
 been wrong.
 We are wrong always when we think too
 much
 Of what we think or are; albeit our
 thoughts
 Be verily bitter as self-sacrifice,
 We're not less selfish. If we sleep on
 rocks
 Or roses, sleeping past the hour of noon
 We're lazy. This I write against my-
 self.

I had done a duty in the visit paid
 To Marian, and was ready otherwise
 To give the witness of my presence and
 name

Whenever she should marry.—Which, I
 thought,

Sufficed. I even had cast into the scale
 An overweight of justice toward the
 match;

The Lady Waldemar had missed her
 tool,

Had broken it in the lock as being too
 straight

For a crooked purpose, while poor Ma-
 rian Erle

Missed nothing in my accents or my
 acts:

I had not been ungenerous on the whole,
 Nor yet untender; so, enough. I felt
 'Tired, overworked: this marriage some-
 what jarred,

Or, if it did not, all the bridal noise . .
 The pricking of the map of life with
 pins,

In schemes of . . . 'Here we'll go,' and
 'There we'll stay,'

And 'everywhere we'll prosper in our
 love,'

Was scarce my business. Let them
 order it;

Who else should care? I threw myself
 aside,

As one who had done her work and
 shuts her eyes
 To rest the better.

I, who should have known,
 Forereckoned mischief! Where we dis-
 avow
 Being keeper to our brother we're his
 Cain.

I might have held that poor child to my
 heart

A little longer! 'twould have hurt me
 much

To have hastened by its beats the mar-
 riage day,

And kept her safe meantime from tamp-
 ering hands

Or, peradventure, traps. What drew me
 back

From telling Romney plainly the de-
 signs

Of Lady Waldemar, as spoken out
 To me . . . me? had I any right, ay, right,

With womanly compassion and reserve
 To break the fall of woman's impu-
 dence?—

To stand by calmly, knowing what I
 knew,

And hear him call her *good*?

Distrust that word.

'There is none good save God,' said
 Jesus Christ.

If He once, in the first creation-week,
 Called creatures good,—for ever after-

ward,
 The Devil only has done it, and his

heirs,
 The knaves who win so, and the fools

who lose;
 The word's grown dangerous. In the

middle age,
 I think they called malignant fays and

imps
 Good people. A good neighbour, even

in this,
 Is fatal sometimes,—cuts your morning

up
 To mince-meat of the very smallest

talk,
 Then helps to sugar her bohea at night

With your reputation. I have known
 good wives,

As chaste, or nearly so, as Potiphar's;
 And good, good mothers, who would use

a child

To better an intrigue ; good friends,
 beside,
 (Very good) who hung succinctly round
 your neck
 And sucked your breath, as cats are
 fabled to do
 By sleeping infants. And we all have
 known
 Good critics who have stamped out
 poet's hopes ;
 Good statesmen who pulled ruin on the
 state ;
 Good patriots who for a theory risked a
 cause ;
 Good kings who disembowelled for a
 tax ;
 Good popes who brought all good to
 jeopardy ;
 Good Christians who sate still in easy
 chairs
 And damned the general world for stand-
 ing up.—
 Now may the good God pardon all good
 men !

How bitterly I speak,—how certainly
 The innocent white milk in us is turned,
 By much persistent shining of the sun !
 Shake up the sweetest in us long enough
 With men, it drops to foolish curd, too
 sour
 To feed the most untender of Christ's
 lambs.

I should have thought . . a woman of
 the world
 Like her I'm meaning,—centre to her-
 self,
 Who has wheeled on her own pivot half a
 life
 In isolated self-love and self-will,
 As a windmill seen at distance radiating
 Its delicate white vans against the sky,
 So soft and soundless, simply beautiful,
 Seen nearer . . what a roar and tear it
 makes,
 How it grinds and bruises ! . . if she
 loves at last
 Her love's a e-adjustment of self-love,
 No more ; a need felt of another's use
 To her one advantage,—as the mill wants
 grain,
 The fire wants fuel, the very wolf wants
 prey,
 And none of these is more unscrupulous

Than such a charming woman when she
 loves.

She'll not be thwarted by an obstacle
 So trifling as . . her soul is, . . much
 less yours !—

Is God a consideration?—she loves *you*,
 Not God ; she will not flinch for Him
 indeed :

She did not for the Marchioness of
 Perth,

When wanting tickets for the fancy-ball.
 She loves you, sir, with passion, to luna-
 cy ;

She loves you like her diamonds . . al-
 most.

Well,

A month passed so, and then the notice
 came ;

On such a day the marriage at the
 church.

I was not backward.

Half St. Giles in frieze
 Was bidden to meet St. James in cloth
 of gold,

And, after contract at the altar, pass
 To eat a marriage feast on Hampstead
 Heath.

Of course the people came in uncom-
 pelled,

Lame, blind, and worse—sick, sorrowful,
 and worse,

The humours of the peccant social
 wound

All poured out, poured down upon Pim-
 lico,

Exasperating the unaccustomed air
 With hideous interfusion : you'd sup-
 pose

A finished generation, dead of plague,
 Swept outward from their graves into
 the sun,

The moil of death upon them. What a
 sight !

A holiday of miserable men

Is sadder than a burial-day of kings.

They clogged the streets, they oozed into
 the church

In a dark slow stream like blood. To
 see that sight,

The noble ladies stood up in their pews,
 Some pale for fear, a few as red for hate,
 Some simply curious, some just insolent,
 And some in wondering scorn,—‘ What
 next? what next?’

These crushed their delicate rose-lips
 from the smile
 'That misbecame them in a holy place,
 With brodered hems of perfumed hand-
 kerchiefs;
 Those passed the salts with confidence
 of eyes
 And simultaneous shiver of moire silk;
 While all the aisles, alive and black
 with heads,
 Crawled slowly toward the altar from
 the street,
 As bruised snakes crawl and hiss out of
 a hole
 With shuddering involution, swaying
 slow
 From right to left, and then from left
 to right,
 In pants and pauses. What an ugly
 crest
 Of faces rose upon you everywhere
 From that crammed mass! you did not
 usually
 See faces like them in the open day:
 They hide in cellars, not to make you
 mad
 As Romney Leigh is.—Faces!—O my
 God,
 We call those, faces? men's and wo-
 men's . . . ay,
 And children's;—babies, hanging like a
 rag
 Forgotten on their mother's neck,—poor
 mouths,
 Wiped clean of mother's milk by moth-
 er's blow
 Before they are taught her cursing.
 Faces? . . . phew,
 We'll call them vices festering to des-
 pairs,
 Or sorrows petrifying to vices: not
 A finger-touch of God left whole on
 them;
 All ruined, lost—the countenance worn
 out
 As the garment, the will dissoiute as the
 act;
 The passions loose and drangling in the
 dirt
 To trip the foot up at the first free
 step!
 Those, faces! 'twas as if you had stirred
 up hell
 To heave its lowest dreg-fiends upper-
 most

In fiery swirls of slime,—such strangled
 fronts,
 Such obdurate jaws were thrown up
 constantly
 To twit you with your race, corrupt
 your blood,
 And grind to devilish colours all your
 dreams
 Henceforth, . . . though, haply, you
 should drop asleep
 By clink of silver waters, in a muse
 On Raffael's mild Madonna of the Bird.

I've waked and slept through many
 nights and days
 Since then,—but still that day will catch
 my breath
 Like a nightmare. There are fatal days,
 indeed,
 In which the fibrous years have taken
 root
 So deeply, that they quiver to their tops
 Whene're you stir the dust of such a day.

My cousin met me with his eyes and
 hand,
 And then, with just a word, . . . that
 'Marian Erle
 Was coming with her bridesmaids
 presently,
 Made haste to place me by the altar-
 stair,
 Where he and other noble gentlemen
 And high-born ladies, waited for the
 bride.

We waited. It was early: there was
 time
 For greeting, and the morning's com-
 pliment;
 And gradually a ripple of women's talk
 Arose and fell, and tossed about a spray
 Of English ss, soft as a silent hush,
 And, notwithstanding, quite as audible
 As louder phrases thrown out by the men.
 —'Yes, really, if we need to wait in
 church,
 We need to talk there.'—'She? 'Tis
 Lady Ayr,
 In blue—not purple! that's the dow-
 ager.'
 —'She looks as young.'—'She flirts as
 young, you mean.
 Why if you had seen her upon Thursday
 night,

You'd call Miss Norris modest.'—'You again!
 I waltzed with you three hours back.
 Up at six,
 Up still at ten: scarce time to change one's shoes.
 I feel as white and sulky as a ghost,
 So pray don't speak to me, Lord Belcher.'—'No,
 I'll look at you instead, and it's enough
 While you have that face.'—'In church,
 my lord! fie, fie!'
 —'Adair, you stayed for the Division?'
 —'Lost
 By one.'—'The devil it is! I'm sorry for't.
 And if I had not promised Mistress Grove'. . .
 —'You might have kept your word to Liverpool.'
 'Constituents must remember, after all,
 We're mortal.'—'We remind them of it.'
 —'Hark,
 The bride comes! Here she comes, in a stream of milk!'
 —'There? Dear, you are asleep still; don't you know
 The five Miss Granvilles? always dressed in white
 To show they're ready to be married.'—
 'Lower!
 The aunt is at your elbow.'—'Lady Maud,
 Did Lady Waldemar tell you she had seen
 This girl of Leigh's?'—'No,—wait! 'twas Mistress Brookes,
 Who told me Lady Waldemar told her—
 No, 'twasn't Mrs. Brookes.'—'She's pretty?'—'Who?
 Mrs. Brookes? Lady Waldemar?'—
 'How hot!
 Pray is't the law to-day we're not to breathe?
 You're treading on my shawl—I thank you, sir'
 —'They say the bride's a mere child, who can't read,
 But knows the things she shouldn't, with wide-awake
 Great eyes. I'd go through fire to look at her.'
 —'You do, I think.'—'And Lady Waldemar

(You see her; sitting close to Romney Leigh;
 How beautiful she looks, a little flushed!)
 Has taken up the girl, and methodised Leigh's folly. Should I have come here, you suppose,
 Except she'd asked me?'—'She'd have served him more
 By marrying him herself.'
 'Ah—there she comes,
 The bride, at last!'
 'Indeed, no. Past eleven.
 She puts off her patched petticoat to-day
 And puts on May-fair manners, so beg-
 gins
 By setting us to wait.'—'Yes, yes, this Leigh
 Was always odd; it's in the blood, I think;
 His father's uncle's cousin's second son
 Was, was . . you understand me—and for him,
 He's stark!—has turned quite lunatic upon
 This modern question of the poor—the poor:
 An excellent subject when you're moderate;
 You've seen Prince Albert's model lodging-house?
 Does honour to his royal highness. Good!
 But would he stop his carriage in Cheap-side
 To shake a common fellow by the fist
 Whose name was . . Shakspeare? no.
 We draw a line,
 And if we stand not by our order, we
 In England, we fall headlong. Here's a sight,—
 A hideous sight, a most indecent sight
 My wife would come, sir, or I had kept her back.
 By heaven, sir, when poor Damiens' trunk and limbs
 Were torn by horses, women of the court
 Stood by and stared, exactly as to-day
 On this dismembering of society,
 With pretty troubled faces.'
 'Now, at last.
 She comes now.'
 'Where? who sees? you push me, sir,
 Beyond the point of what is mannerly.

You're standing, madam, on my second
flounce
I do beseech you.'

'No—it's not the bride.
Half-past eleven. How late. The
bridegroom, mark,
Gets anxious and goes out.'

'And as I said,
These Leighs! our best blood running in
the rut!

It's something awful. We had pardoned
him

A simple misalliance, got up aside
For a pair of sky-blue eyes; our House
of Lords

Has winked at such things, and we've
all been young.

But here's an inter-marriage reasoned
out,

A contract (carried boldly to the light
To challenge observation, pioneer
Good acts by a great example)'twixt the
extremes

Of martyrised society,—on the left
The well-born,—on the right the merest
mob,

To treat as equals!—'tis anarchical!
It means more than it says—'tis damna-
ble.

Why, sir, we can't have even our coffee
good,

Unless we strain it.'

'Here, Miss Leigh!'

'Lord Howe,
You're Romney's friend. What's all
this waiting for?'

'I cannot tell. "The bride has lost her
head

(And, way perhaps!) to prove her sym-
pathy

With the bridegroom.'

'What,—you also disapprove!'

'Oh, I approve of nothing in the world.'
He answered; 'not of you, still less of
me,

Nor even of Romney—though he's
worth us both.

We're all gone wrong. The tune in us
is lost:

And whistling down back alleys to the
moon,

Will never catch it.

Let me draw Lord Howe;

A born aristocrat, bred radical,
And educated socialist, who still
Goes floating, on traditions of his kind,
Across the theoretic flood from France,
Though, like a drenched Noah on a rot-
ten deck,

Scarce safer for his place there. He, at
least,

Will never land on Ararat, he knows,
To recommence the world on the new
plan:

Indeed, he thinks, said world had better
end;

He sympathises rather with the fish
Outside, than with the drowned paired
beasts within

Who cannot couple again or multiply:
And that's the sort of Noah he is, Lord
Howe.

He never could be anything complete,
Except a loyal, upright gentleman,
A liberal landlord, graceful diner-out,
And entertainer more than hospitable.
Whom authors dine with and forget the
hock

Whatever he believes, and it is much,
But no-wise certain . . . now here and
now there,

He still has sympathies beyond his creed
Diverting him from action. In the
House,

No party counts upon him, while for all
His speeches have a noticeable weight.
Men like his books too, (he has written
books)

Which, safe to lie beside a bishop's
chair,

At times outreach themselves with jets
of fire

At which the foremost of the progress-
ists

May warm audacious hands in passing
by.

—Of stature over-tall, lounging for ease:
Light hair, that seems to carry a wind
in it,

And eyes that, when they look on you,
will lean

Their whole weight half in indolence
and half

In wishing you unmitigated good,
Until you know not if to flinch from him
Or thank him,—'Tis Lord Howe.

'We're all gone wrong,'

Said he, 'and Romney, that dear friend
 of ours,
 Is no-wise right. There's one true
 thing on earth ;
 That's love ! He takes it up, and
 dresses it,
 And acts a play with it, as Hamlet did,
 To show what cruel uncles we have
 been,
 And how we should be uneasy in our
 minds
 While he, Prince Hamlet, weds a pretty
 maid
 (Who keeps us too long waiting, we'll
 confess)
 By symbol, to instruct us formally
 To fill the ditches up 'twixt class and
 class,
 And live together in phalansteries.
 What then ?—he's mad, our Hamlet !
 clap his play,
 And bind him.'

' Ah, Lord Howe, this spectacle
 Pulls stronger at us than the Dane's.
 See there !

The crammed aisles heave and strain and
 steam with life—

Dear Heaven, what life !'

' Why, yes,—a poet sees ;
 Which makes him different from a com-
 mon man.

I, too, see somewhat, though I cannot
 sing ;

I should have been a poet, only that
 My mother took fright at the ugly
 world,

And bore me tongue-tied. If you'll grant
 me now

That Romney gives us a fine actor-piece
 To make us merry on his marriage-
 morn,

The fable's worse than Hamlet's, I'll
 concede.

The terrible people, old and poor and
 blind,

Their eyes eat out with plague and
 poverty

From seeing beautiful and cheerful sights,
 We'll liken to a brutalised King Lear,
 Led out,—by no means to clear scores
 with wrongs—

His wrongs are so far back, . . he has
 forgot ;

All's past like youth ; but just to witness
 here

A simple contract,—he, upon his side,
 And Regan with her sister Goneril
 And all the dappled courtiers and court-
 fools,

On their side. Not that any of these
 would say

They're sorry, neither. What is done,
 is done,

And violence is now turned privilege,
 As cream turns cheese, if buried long
 enough.

What could such lovely ladies have to do
 With the old man there, in those ill-
 odorous rags,

Except to keep the wind-side of him ?
 Lear

Is flat and quiet, as a decent grave ;
 He does not curse his daughters in the
 least.

Be these his daughters ? Lear is think-
 ing of

His porridge chiefly . . is it getting cold
 At Hampstead ? will the ale be served in
 pots ?

Poor Lear, poor daughters ! Bravo,
 Romney's play !'

A murmur and a movement drew
 around ;

A naked whisper touched us. Some-
 thing wrong !

What's wrong ? The black crowd, as an
 overstrained

Cord, quivered in vibration, and I
 saw . .

Was that *his* face I saw ? . . his . .
 Romney Leigh's . .

Which tossed a sudden horror like a
 sponge

Into all eyes,—while himself stood white
 upon

The topmost altar-stair, and tried to
 speak,

And failed, and lifted higher above his
 head

A letter, . . as a man who drowns and
 gasps.

' My brothers, bear with me ! I am
 very weak.

I meant but only good. Perhaps I
 meant

Too proudly,—and God snatched the cir-
 cumstance

And changed it therefore. There's no marriage—none.

She leaves me,—she departs,—she disappears,

I lose her. Yet I never forced her 'ay,'
To have her 'no' so cast into my teeth,
In manner of an accusation, thus.

My friends, you are dismissed. Go, eat
and drink

According to the programme,—and farewell !

He ended. There was silence in the church ;

We heard a baby sucking in its sleep
At the farthest end of the aisle. Then
spoke a man,

' Now, look to it, coves, that all the beef
and drink

Be not filched from us like the other
fun ;

For beer's spilt easier than a woman's
lost !

This gentry is not honest with the poor ;
They bring us up, to trick us.—' Go it,
Jim,'

A woman screamed back,—' I'm a tender
soul,

I never banged a child at two years old
And drew blood from him, but I sobbed
for it

Next moment,—and I've had a plague
of seven.

I'm tender ; I've no stomach even for
beef,

Until I know about the girl that's lost,
That's killed, mayhap. I did misdoubt,
at first,

The fine lord meant no good by her or
us.

He, maybe, got the upper hand of her
By holding up a wedding-ring, and
then . .

A choking finger on her throat last
night,

And just a clever tale to keep us still,
As she is, poor lost innocent. ' Disap-
pear !'

Who ever disappears except a ghost ?
And who believes a story of a ghost ?

I ask you,—would a girl go off, instead
Of staying to be married ? a fine tale !

A wicked man, I say, a wicked man !
For my part I would rather starve on
gin

Than make my dinner on his beef and
beer.'—

At which a cry rose up—' We'll have
our rights.

We'll have the girl, the girl ! Your la-
dies there

Are married safely and smoothly every
day,

And *she* shall not drop through into a
trap

Because she's poor and of the people :
shame !

We'll have no tricks played off by gentle-
folks ;

We'll see her righted.'

Through the rage and roar
I heard the broken words which Romney
flung

Among the turbulent masses, from the
ground

He held still with his masterful pale
face—

As huntsmen throw the ration to the
pack,

Who, falling on it headlong, dog on dog
In heaps of fury, rend it, swallow it up

With yelling hound-jaws,—his indignant
words,

His suppliant words, his most pathetic
words,

Whereof I caught the meaning here and
there

By his gesture . . torn in morsels, yelled
across,

And so devoured. From end to end,
the church

Rocked round us like the sea in storm,
and then

Broke up like the earth in earthquake.
Men cried out,

' Poice '—and women stood and shrieked
for God,

Or dropt and swooned ; or, like a herd
of deer,

(For whom the black woods suddenly
grow alive,

Unleashing their wild shadows down the
wind

To hunt the creatures into corners, back
And forward) madly fled, or blindly fell,

Trod screeching underneath the feet of
those

Who fled and screeched.

The last sight left to me
Was Romney's terrible calm face above

The tumult!—the last sound was ‘Pull him down!’
Strike—kill him!’ Stretching my un-reasoning arms,
As men in dreams, who vainly interpose
’Twixt gods and their undoing, with a cry
I struggled to precipitate myself
Head-foremost, to the rescue of my soul
In that white face, . . till some one
caught me back,
And so the world went out,—I felt no more.

What followed, was told after by Lord Howe,
Who bore me senseless from the strangling crowd
In church and street, and then returned alone
To see the tumult quelled. The men of law
Had fallen as thunder on a roaring fire,
And made all silent,—while the people’s smoke
Passed eddying slowly from the emptied aisles.

Here’s Marian’s letter, which a ragged child
Brought running, just as Romney at the porch
Looked out expectant of the bride. He sent
The letter to me by his friend Lord Howe
Some two hours after, folded in a sheet
On which his well known hand had left a word.
Here’s Marian’s letter.

‘Noble friend, dear saint,
Be patient with me. Never think me vile,
Who might to-morrow morning be your wife
But that I loved you more than such a name.
Farewell, my Romney. Let me write it once,—
My Romney.

‘Tis so pretty a coupled word,
I have no heart to pluck it with a blot.
We say ‘my God’ sometimes, upon our knees,

Who is not therefore vexed: so bear with it . .
And me. I know I’m foolish, weak, and vain;
Yet most of all I’m angry with myself
For losing your last footstep on the stair
The last time of your coming,—yesterday!
The very first time I lost step of yours,
(Its sweetness comes the next to what you speak)
But yesterday sobs took me by the throat
And cut me off from music.

‘Mister Leigh,
You’ll set me down as wrong in many things.
You’ve praised me, sir, for truth,—and now you’ll learn
I had not courage to be rightly true.
I once began to tell you how she came,
The woman . . and you stared upon the floor
In one of your fixed thoughts . . which put me out
For that day. After, some one spoke of me,
So wisely, and of you, so tenderly,
Persuading me to silence for your sake . .
Well, well! it seems this moment I was wrong
In keeping back from telling you the truth:
There might be truth betwixt us two, at least,
If nothing else. And yet ’twas dangerous.
Suppose a real angel came from heaven
To live with men and women! he’d go mad,
If no considerate hand should tie a blind
Across his piercing eyes. ’Tis thus with you:
You see us too much in your heavenly light;
I always thought so, angel,—and indeed
There’s danger that you beat yourself to death
Against the edges of this alien world,
In some divine and fluttering pity.

‘Yes,
It would be dreadful for a friend of yours,
To see all England thrust you out of doors

And mock you from the windows. You
might say,
Or think (that's worse,) 'There's some
one in the house
I miss and love still.' Dreadful!

'Very kind,
I pray you mark, was Lady Waldemar.
She came to see me nine times, rather
ten—

So beautiful, she hurts one like the day
Let suddenly on sick eyes.

'Most kind of all,
Your cousin!—ah, most like you! Ere
you came

She kissed me mouth to mouth: I felt
her soul

Dip through her serious lips in holy
fire.

God help me, but it made me arrogant;
I almost told her that you would not
lose

By taking me to wife: though ever since
I've pondered much a certain thing she
asked . .

'He loves you, Marian?' . . in a sort
of mild

Derisive sadness . . as a mother asks
Her babe, 'You'll touch that star, you
think?'

'Farewell!
I know I never touched it.

'This is worst:
Babes grow, and lose the hope of things
above;

A silver threepence sets them leaping
high—

But no more stars! mark that.

'I've writ all night,
Yet told you nothing. God, if I could
die,

And let this letter break off innocent
Just here! But no—for your sake . .

'Here's the last:
I never could be happy as your wife,
I never could be harmless as your friend,
I never will look more into your face
'Till God says, 'Look!' I charge you,
seek me not,

Nor vex yourself with lamentable
thoughts

'That peradventure I have come to grief;
Be sure I'm well, I'm merry, I'm at
ease,

But such a long way, long way, long way
off,

I think you'll find me sooner in my
grave;

And that's my choice, observe. For
what remains,

An over-generous friend will care for me
And keep me happy . . happier . .

'There's a blot!
This ink runs thick . . we light girls
lightly weep . .

And keep me happier . . was the thing
to say,

'Than as your wife I could be!—O, my
star,

My saint, my soul! for surely you're my
soul,

Through whom God touched me! I am
not so lost

I cannot thank you for the good you did,
The tears you stopped, which fell down
bitterly,

Like these—the times you made me weep
for joy

At hoping I should learn to write your
notes

And save the tiring of your eyes, at
night;

And most for that sweet thrice you kiss-
ed my lips

And said 'Dear Marian'

'Twould be hard to read,
This letter, for a reader half as learn'd,

But you'll be sure to master it in spite
Of ups and downs. My hand shakes, I
am blind,

I'm poor at writing at the best,—and yet
I tried to make my *g's* the way you
showed.

Farewell—Christ love you.—Say 'Poor
Marian' now.'

Poor Marian!—wanton Marian!—was
it so,

Or so? For days, her touching, foolish
lines

We mused on with conjectural fantasy,
As if some riddle of a summer-cloud

On which one tries unlike similitudes
Of now a spotted Hydra-skin cast off,

And now a screen of carven ivory
That shuts the heaven's conventual se-
crets up

From mortals over-bold. We sought the
sense:

She loved him so perhaps (such words
mean love,)

That, worked on by some shrewd perfidious tongue,
 (And then I thought of Lady Waldemar)
 She left him, not to hurt him; or perhaps
 She loved one in her class,—or did not love,
 But mused upon her wild bad tramping life
 Until the free blood fluttered at her heart,
 And black bread eaten by the road-side hedge
 Seemed sweeter than being put to Romney's school
 Of philanthropical self-sacrifice,
 Irrevocably.—Girls are girls, beside,
 Thought I, and like a wedding by one rule.
 You seldom catch these birds except with chaff:
 They feel it almost an immoral thing
 To go out and be married in broad day,
 Unless some winning special flattery should
 Excuse them to themselves for't, . . . 'No one parts
 Her hair with such a silver line as you,
 One moonbeam from the forehead to the crown!'
 Or else . . . 'You bite your lip in such a way,
 It spoils me for the smiling of the rest'—
 And so on. Then a worthless gaud or two
 To keep for love,—a ribbon for the neck,
 Or some glass pin,—they have their weight with girls.
 And Romney sought her many days and weeks:
 He sifted all the refuse of the town,
 Explored the trains, inquired among the ships,
 And felt the country through from end to end;
 No Marian!—Though I hinted what I knew,—
 A friend of his had reasons of her own
 For throwing back the match—he would not hear:
 The lady had been ailing ever since,
 The shock had harmed her. Something in his tone

Repressed me; something in me shamed my doubt
 To a sigh repressed too. He went on to say
 That, putting questions where his Marian lodged,
 He found she had received for visitors,
 Besides himself and Lady Waldemar . . .
 And, that once, me—a dubious woman dressed
 Beyond us both. The rings upon her hands
 Had dazed the children when she threw them pence;
 'She wore her bonnet as the queen might hers,
 To show the crown,' they said,—'a scarlet crown
 Of roses that had never been in bud.'
 When Romney told me that,—for now and then
 He came to tell me how the search advanced,
 His voice dropped: I bent forward for the rest:
 The woman had been with her, it appeared,
 At first from week to week, then day by day,
 And last, 'twas sure . . .
 I looked upon the ground
 To escape the anguish of his eyes, and asked
 As low as when you speak to mourners new
 Of those they cannot bear yet to call dead,
 'If Marian had as much as named to him
 A certain Rose, an early friend of hers,
 A ruined creature.'
 'Never.'—Starting up
 He strode from side to side about the room,
 Most like some prisoned lion sprung awake,
 Who has felt the desert sting him through his dreams.
 'What was I to her that she should tell me aught?
 A friend! was I a friend? I see all clear.
 Such devils would pull angels out of heaven,

Provided they could reach them; 'tis
their pride;

And that's the odds 'twixt soul and body-
plague!

The veriest slave who drops in Cairo's
street,

Cries, 'Stand off from me,' to the pass-
engers:

While these blotched souls are eager to
infect,

And blow their bad breath in a sister's
face

As if they got some ease by it.'

I broke through.

'Some natures catch no plagues. I've
read of babes

Found whole and sleeping by the spotted
breast

Of one a full day dead. I hold it true,
As I'm a woman and know womanhood,

That Marian Erle, however lured from
place,

Deceived in way, keeps pure in aim and
heart

As snow that's drifted from the garden-
bank

To the open road.'

'Twas hard to hear him laugh.

'The figure's happy. Well—a dozen
carts

And trampers will secure you presently
A fine white snow-drift. Leave it there,
your snow!

'Twill pass for soot ere sunset. Pure in
aim?

She's pure in aim, I grant you,—like
myself,

Who thought to take the world upon my
back

To carry it o'er a chasm of social ill,
And end by letting slip through impo-
tence

A single soul, a child's weight in a soul,
Straight down the pit of hell! yes, I and
she

Have reason to be proud of our pure
aims.'

Then softly, as the last repenting drops
Of a thunder-shower, he added, 'The
poor child;

Poor Marian! 'twas a luckless day for
her,

When first she chanced on my philan-
thropy.'

He drew a chair beside me, and sate
down;

And I, instinctively, as women use
Before a sweet friend's grief,—when, in
his ear,

They hum the tune of comfort though
themselves

Most ignorant of the special words of
such,

And quiet so and fortify his brain
And give it time and strength for feeling
out

To reach the availing sense beyond that
sound,—

Went murmuring to him what, if written
here,

Would seem not much, yet fetched him
better help

Than, peradventure, if it had been more.

I've known the pregnant thinkers of our
time,

And stood by breathless, hanging on
their lips,

When some chromatic sequence of fine
thought

In learned modulation phrased itself
To an un conjectured harmony of truth.

And yet I've been more moved, more
raised, I say,

By a simple word . . . a broken easy
thing

A three-years infant might at need re-
peat,

A look, a sigh, a touch upon the palm,
Which meant less than 'I love you' . . .
than by all

The full-voiced rhetoric of those master-
mouths.

'Ah, dear Aurora,' he began at last,
His pale lips fumbling for a sort of smile,

'Your printer's devils have not spoilt
your heart:

That's well. And who knows but, long
years ago,

When you and I talked, you were some-
what right

In being so peevish with me? You, at
least,

Have ruined no one through your dreams.
Instead,

You've helped the facile youth live
youth's day

With innocent distraction, still perhaps

Suggestive of things better than your rhymes.

The little shepherd-maiden, eight years old,

I've seen upon the mountains of Vauclose,

Asleep 't the sun, her head upon her knees,

The flocks all scattered,—is more laudable

Than any sheep-dog trained imperfectly,
Who bites the kids through too much zeal.'

'I look

As if I had slept, then?'

He was touched at once

By something in my face. Indeed 'twas sure

That he and I,—despite a year or two
Of younger life on my side, and on his
The heaping of the years' work on the days,

The three-hour speeches from the member's seat,

The hot committees in and out of doors,
The pamphlets, 'Arguments,' 'Collective Views,'

Tossed out as straw before sick houses, just

To show one's sick and so be trod to dirt
And no more use,—through this world's underground

The burrowing, groping effort, whence the arm

And heart come torn,—'twas sure that he and I

Were, after all, unequally fatigued!

That he, in his developed manhood, stood

A little sunburnt by the glare of life;

While I . . . it seemed no sun had shone on me,

So many seasons I had missed my Springs;

My cheeks had pined and perished from their orbs,

And all the youth-blood in them had grown white

As dew on autumn cyclamens: alone

My eyes and forehead answered for my face.

He said, 'Aurora, you are changed—are ill!'

'Not so, my cousin,—only not asleep,'
I answered, smiling gently. 'Let it be.
You scarcely found the poet of Vauclose
As drowsy as the shepherds. What is art

But life upon the larger scale, the higher,

When, graduating up in a spiral line
Of still expanding and ascending gyres,
It pushes toward the intense significance
Of all things, hungry for the Infinite?
Art's life,—and where we live, we suffer
and toil.'

He seemed to sift me with his painful eyes.

'You take it gravely, cousin; you refuse

Your dreamland's right of common, and green rest.

You break the mythic turf where danced the nymphs

With crooked ploughs of actual life,—let in

The axes to the legendary woods,
To pay the head-tax. You are fallen indeed

On evil days, you poets, if yourselves
Can praise that art of yours no other-wise;

And, if you cannot; . . . better take a trade

And be of use: 'twere cheaper for your youth.'

'Of use!' I softly echoed, 'there's the point

We sweep about forever in an argument;

Like swallows which the exasperate, dying year

Sets spinning in black circles, round and round,

Preparing for far flights o'er unknown seas.

And we . . . where tend we?'

'Where?' he said, and sighed.

'The whole creation, from the hour we are born,

Perplexes us with questions. Not a stone

But cries behind us, every weary step,
'Where, where?' I leave stones to reply to stones.

Enough for me and for my fleshly heart

To harken the invocations of my kind,
When men catch hold upon my shuddering
nerves

And shriek, 'What help? what hope?
what bread i' the house?

What fire i' the frost?' There must be
some response,

Though mine fail utterly. This social
Sphinx

Who sits between the sepulchres and
stews,

Makes mock and mow against the crystal
heavens,

And bullies God,—exacts a word at least
From each man standing on the side of
God,

However paying a sphinx-price for it.
We pay it also if we hold our peace,
In pangs and pity. Let me speak and
die.

Alas! you'll say I speak and kill in-
stead.'

I pressed in there. 'The best men, do-
ing their best,

Know peradventure least of what they
do:

Men usefulest i' the world, are simply
used:

The nail that holds the wood, must pierce
it first,

And He alone who wields the hammer,
sees

The work advanced by the earliest blow.
'Take heart.'

'Ah, if I could have taken yours!' he
said,

'But that's past now.' Then rising . .
'I will take

At least your kindness and encourage-
ment.

I thank you. Dear, be happy. Sing
your songs,

If that's your way! but sometimes slum-
ber too,

Nor tire too much with following, out of
breath,

The rhymes upon your mountains of De-
light.

Reflect, if Art be in truth the higher
life,

You need the lower life to stand upon
In order to reach up unto that higher:

And none can stand a-tiptoe in the place
He cannot stand in with two stable feet.

Remember then!—for Art's sake, hold
your life.'

We parted so. I held him in respect.
I comprehended what he was in heart
And sacrificial greatness. Ay, but *he*
Supposed me a thing too small to deign
to know;

He blew me, plainly, from the crucible,
As some intruding, interrupting fly
Not worth the pains of his analysis
Absorbed on nobler subjects. Hurt a
fly!

He would not for the world: he's pitiful
To flies even. 'Sing,' says he, 'and
tease me still,

If that's your way, poor insect.' That's
your way.

FIFTH BOOK.

AURORA LEIGH, be humble. Shall I
hope

To speak my poems in mysterious tune
With man and nature,—with the lava-
lymph

That trickles from successive galaxies
Still drop by drop adown the finger of
God

In still new worlds?—with summer-days
in this,

That scarce dare breathe they are so
beautiful?

With Spring's delicious trouble in the
ground

Tormented by the quickened blood of
roots,

And softly pricked by golden crocus-
sheaves

In token of the harvest-time of flowers?
With winters and with autumns,—and
beyond

With the human heart's large seasons,
when it hopes

And fears, joys, grieves, and loves?—
with all that strain

Of sexual passion, which devours the
flesh

In a sacrament of souls? with mother's
breasts

Which, round the new-made creatures
hanging there,

Throb luminous and harmonious like
pure spheres?—

With multitudinous life, and finally
 With the great escapings of ecstatic souls,
 Who, in a rush of too long prisoned
 flame,
 Their radiant faces upward, burn away
 'Tis dark of the body, issuing on a
 world
 Beyond our mortal?—can I speak my
 verse
 So plainly in tune to these things and the
 rest,
 That men shall feel it catch them on the
 quick,
 As having the same warrant over them
 'To hold and move them if they will or
 no,
 Alike imperious as the primal rhythm
 Of that theurgic nature? I must fail,
 Who fail at the beginning to hold and
 move
 One man,—and he my cousin, and he
 my friend,
 And he born tender, made intelligent,
 Inclined to ponder the precipitous sides
 Of difficult questions; yet obtuse to *me*,
 Of *me*, incurious! likes me very well,
 And wishes me a paradise of good,
 Good looks, good means, and good di-
 gestion,—ay,
 But otherwise evades me, puts me off
 With kindness, with a tolerant gentle-
 ness,—
 Too light a book for a grave man's read-
 ing! Go,
 Aurora Leigh: be humble.

There it is,
 We women are too apt to look to one,
 Which proves a certain impotence in
 art.
 We strain our natures at doing something
 great,
 Far less because it's something great to
 do,
 Than haply that we, so, commend our-
 selves
 As being not small, and more apprecia-
 ble
 To some one friend. We must have
 mediators
 Betwixt our highest conscience and the
 judge;
 Some sweet saint's blood must quicken
 in our palms
 Or all the life in heaven seems slow and
 cold:

Good only being perceived as the end of
 good,
 And God alone pleased,—that's too poor,
 we think,
 And not enough for us by any means.
 Ay—Romney, I remember, told me once
 We miss the abstract, when we compre-
 hend.
 We miss it most when we aspire, . . and
 fail.

Yet, so, I will not.—This vile woman's
 way
 Of trailing garments, shall not trip me
 up.
 I'll have no traffic with the personal
 thought
 In art's pure temple. Must I work in
 vain,
 Without the approbation of a man?
 It cannot be; it shall not. Fame itself,
 That approbation of the general race,
 Presents a poor end, (though the arrow
 speed,
 Shot straight with vigorous finger to the
 white,)
 And the highest fame was never reached
 except
 By what was aimed above it. Art for
 art,
 And good for God Himself, the essen-
 tial Good!
 We'll keep our aims sublime, our eyes
 erect,
 Although our woman hands should shake
 and fail;
 And if we fail . . But must we?—
 Shall I fail?
 The Greeks said grandly in their tragic
 phrase,
 'Let no one be called happy till his
 death.'
 To which I add,—Let no one till his
 death
 Be called unhappy. Measure not the
 work
 Until the day's out and the labour done;
 Then bring your gauges. If the day's
 work's scant,
 Why, call it scant; affect no compro-
 mise;
 And, in that we have nobly stiven at
 least,
 Deal with us nobly, women though we
 be,

And honor us with truth if not with
praise.

My ballads prospered ; but the ballad's
race

Is rapid for a poet who bears weights
Of thought and golden image. He can
stand

Like Atlas, in the sonnet,—and support
His own heavens pregnant with dynastic
stars ;

But then he must stand still, nor take a
step.

In that descriptive poem called 'The
Hills,'

The prospects were too far and indis-
tinct.

'Tis true my critics said, 'A fine view,
that !'

The public scarcely cared to climb the
book

For even the finest ; and the public's
right,

A tree's mere firewood, unless human-
ised ;

Which well the Greeks knew when they
stirred its bark

With close-pressed bosoms of subsiding
nymphs,

And made the forest-rivers garrulous
With babble of gods. For us, we are
called to mark

A still more intimate humanity
In this inferior nature,—or, ourselves,
Must fall like dead leaves trodden un-
derfoot

By veritable artists. Earth, shut up
By Adam, like a fakir in a box

Left too long buried, remained stiff and
dry,

A mere dumb corpse, till Christ the Lord
came down,

Unlocked the doors, forced open the
blank eyes,

And used His kingly chrism to straighten
out

The leathery tongue turned back into
the throat :

Since when, she lives, remembers, pal-
pitates

In every limb, aspires in every breath,
Embraces infinite relations. Now

We want no half-gods, Panomphæan
Joves,

Fauns, Naiads, Tritons, Oreads, and
the rest,

To take possession of a senseless world
To unnatural vampyre-uses. See the
earth,

The body of our body, the green earth,
Indubitably human like this flesh

And these articulated veins through
which

Our heart drives blood ! there's not a
flower of spring

That dies ere June, but vaunts itself al-
lied

By issue and symbol, by significance
And correspondence, to that spirit-world

Outside the limits of our space and
time,

Whereto we are bound. Let poets give
it voice

With human meanings ; else they miss
the thought,

And henceforth step down lower, stand
confessed

Instructed poorly for interpreters,
Thrown out by an easy cowslip in the
text.

Even so my pastoral failed : it was a
book

Of surface-pictures — pretty, cold, and
false

With literal transcript,—the worse done,
I think,

For being not ill-done. Let me set my
mark

Against such doings, and do otherwise.
This strikes me.—If the public whom

we know,
Could catch me at such admissions, I
should pass

For being right modest. Yet how proud
we are,

In daring to look down upon ourselves !

The critics say that epics have died out
With Agamemnon and the goat-nursed
gods—

I'll not believe it. I could never deem
As Payne Knight did, (the mythic moun-
taineer

Who travelled higher than he was born
to live,

And showed sometimes the goitre in his
throat

Discoursing of an image seen through
fog.)

That Homer's heroes measured twelve
feet high.

They were but men:—his Helen's hair
turned gray

Like any plain Miss Smith's, who wears
a front;

And Hector's infant whimpered at a
plume.

All actual heroes are essential men,
And all men possible heroes: every age,

Heroic in proportions, double-faced,
Looks backward and before, expects a

morn
And claims an epos.

Ay, but every age

Appears to souls who live in 't, (ask
Carlyle)

Most unheroic. Ours, for instance,
ours:

The thinkers scout it, and the poets
abound

Who scorn to touch it with a finger-tip:
A pewter age,—mixed metal, silver-
washed;

An age of scum, spooned off the richer
past,

An age of patches for old gaberdines,
An age of mere transition, meaning

nought
Except that what succeeds must shame
it quite

If God please. That's wrong thinking,
to my mind,

And wrong thoughts make poor poems.

Every age,

Through being beheld too close, is ill-
discerned

By those who have not lived past it.
We'll suppose

Mount Athos carved, as Alexander
schemed,

To some colossal statue of a man:
The peasants, gathering brushwood in

his ear,
Had guessed as little as the browsing
goats

Of form or feature of humanity
Up there,—in fact, had travelled five

miles off
Or ere the giant image broke on them,
Full human profile, nose and chin dis-

tinct,

Mouth, muttering rhythms of silence up
the sky,

And fed at evening with the blood of
suns;

Grand torso,—hand that flung perpetual-
ly

The largesse of a silver river down
To all the country pastures. 'Tis even

thus
With times we live in,—evermore too
great

To be apprehended near.

But poets should

Exert a double vision; should have eyes
To see near things as comprehensively

As if afar they took their point of sight,
And distant things as intimately deep

As if they touched them. Let us strive
for this.

I do distrust the poet who discerns
No character or glory in his times,

And trundles back his soul five hundred
years,

Past moat and drawbridge, into a castle-
court,

To sing—oh not of lizard or of toad
Alive i' the ditch there,—'twere excusa-
ble;

But of some black chief, half knight, half
sheep-lifter,

Some beauteous dame, half chattel and
half queen,

As dead as must be, for the greater part,
The poems made on their chivalric

bones.
And that's no wonder: death inherits
death.

Nay, if there's room for poets in this
world

A little overgrown, (I think there is)
Their sole work is to represent the age,

Their age, not Charlemagne's,—this live,
throbbing age,

That brawls, cheats, maddens, calculates,
aspires,

And spends more passion, more heroic
heat,

Betwixt the mirrors of its drawing-
rooms,

Than Roland with his knights at
Roncesvalles.

To flinch from modern varnish, coat or
founce,

Cry out for togas and the picturesque,

Is fatal,—foolish too. King Arthur's self

Was commonplace to Lady Guenever ;
And Camelot to minstrels seemed as flat,

As Fleet Street to our poets.

Never flinch,
But still, unscrupulously epic, catch
Upon the burning lava of a song
The full-veined, heaving, double-breasted age :

That, when the next shall come, the men
of that

May touch the impress with reverent
hand, and say

'Behold,—behold, the paps we all have
sucked !

This bosom seems to beat still, or at
least

It sets ours beating. This is living art,
Which thus presents and thus records
true life.'

What form is best for poems? Let me
think

Of forms less, and the external. Trust
the spirit,

As sovran nature docs, to make the
form ;

For otherwise we only imprison spirit
And not embody. Inward evermore
To outward,—so in life, and so in art,
Which still is life.

Five acts to make a play.
And why not fifteen? why not ten? or
seven?

What matter for the number of the
leaves,

Supposing the tree lives and grows? exact

The literal unities of time and place,
When 'tis the essence of passion to ignore

Both time and place? Absurd. Keep
up the fire,

And leave the generous flames to shape
themselves.

'Tis true the stage requires obsequious-
ness

To this or that convention ; 'exit' here
And 'enter' there ; the points for clapping, fixed,

Like Jacob's white-peeled rods before
the rams :

And all the close-curved imagery clipped
In manner of their fleece at shearing-
time.

Forget to prick the galleries to the heart
Precisely at the fourth act,—culminate
Our five pyramidal acts with one act
more,—

We're lost so ! Shakspeare's ghost
could scarcely plead

Against our just damnation. Stand
aside ;

We'll muse for comfort that, last cen-
tury,

On this same tragic stage on which we
have failed,

A wigless Hamlet would have failed the
same.

And whosoever writes good poetry,
Looks just to art. He does not write
for you

Or me,—for London or for Edinburgh ;
He will not suffer the best critic known
To step into his sunshine of free thought
And self-absorbed conception, and exact
An inch-long swerving of the holy lines.
If virtue done for popularity

Defiles like vice, can art for praise or
hire

Still keep its splendour, and remain pure
art?

Eschew such serfdom. What the poet
writes,

He writes : mankind accepts it if it suits,
And that's success : if not, the poem's
passed

From hand to hand, and yet from hand
to hand,

Until the unborn snatch it, crying out
In pity on their fathers' being so dull,
And that's success too.

I will write no plays ;
Because the drama, less sublime in this,
Makes lower appeals, defends more
menially,

Adopts the standard of the public taste
To chalk its height on, wears a dog-chain
round

Its regal neck, and learns to carry and
fetch

The fashions of the day to please the
day ;

Fawns close on pit and boxes, who clap
hands,

Commending chiefly its docility

And humour in stage-tricks ; or else indeed
 Gets hissed at, howled at, stamped at
 like a dog,
 Or worse, we'll say. For dogs, unjustly
 kicked,
 Yell, bite at need ; but if your dramatist
 (Being wronged by some five hundred
 nobodies
 Because their grosser brains most naturally
 Misjudge the fineness of his subtle wit)
 Shows teeth an almond's breadth, protests the length
 Of a modest phrase,—‘ My gentle countrymen,
 ‘ There's something in it haply of your fault,’—
 Why, then, beside five hundred nobodies,
 He'll have five thousand and five thousand more
 Against him,—the whole public,—all the
 hoofs
 Of King Saul's father's asses, in full
 drove,
 And obviously deserve it. He appealed
 To these,—and why say more if they condemn,
 Than if they praise him?—Weep, my
 Æschylus,
 But low and far, upon Sicilian shores !
 For since 'twas Athens (so I read the
 myth)
 Who gave commission to that fatal
 weight
 The tortoise, cold and hard, to drop on
 thee
 And crush thee,—better cover thy bald
 head ;
 She'll hear the softest hum of Hyblan
 bee
 Before thy loudest protestation ! Then
 The risk's still worse upon the modern
 stage ;
 I could not, for so little, accept success,
 Nor would I risk so much, in ease and
 calm,
 For manifest gains ; let those who
 prize,
 Pursue them : *I* stand off.

And yet, forbid,
 That any irreverent fancy or conceit

Should litter in the Drama's throne-room
 where
 The rulers of our art, in whose full veins
 Dynastic glories mingle, sit in strength
 And do their kingly work,—conceive,
 command,
 And, from the imagination's crucial heat,
 Catch up their men and and women all
 a-flame
 For action, all alive and forced to prove
 Their life by living out heart, brain, and
 nerve,
 Until mankind makes witness, ‘ These
 be men
 As we are,’ and vouchsafes the greeting
 due
 To Imogen and Juliet—sweetest kin
 On art's side.

‘Tis that, honouring to its worth
 The drama, I would fear to keep it down
 To the level of the footlights. Dies no
 more
 The sacrificial goat, for Bacchus slain,
 His filmed eyes fluttered by the whirling
 white
 Of choral vestures,—troubled in his
 blood,
 While tragic voices that clanged keen as
 swords,
 Leapt high together with the altar-flame
 And made the blue air wink. The waxen
 mask,
 Which set the grand still front of ‘ Themis’
 son
 Upon the puckered visage of a player ;—
 The buskin, which he rose upon and
 moved,
 As some tall ship first conscious of the
 wind
 Sweeps slowly past the piers ;—the
 mouth-piece, where
 The mere man's voice with all its breaths
 and breaks
 Went sheathed in brass, and clashed on
 even heights
 Its phrased thunders ;—these things are
 no more,
 Which once were. And concluding,
 which is clear,
 The growing drama has outgrown such
 toys
 Of simulated stature, face, and speech,
 It also peradventure may outgrow
 The simulation of the painted scene,

Boards, actors, prompters, gaslight, and
costume ;
And take for a worthier stage the soul it-
self,
Its shifting fancies and celestial lights,
With all its grand orchestral silences
To keep the pauses of the rhythmic
sounds.

Alas, I still see something to be done,
And what I do falls short of what I see
Though I waste myself on doing. Long
green days,
Worn bare of grass and sunshine,—long
calm nights,
From which the silken sleeps were fretted
out,
Be witness for me, with no amateur's
Irreverent haste and busy idleness
I set myself to art ! What then ? what's
done ?
What's done, at last ?

Behold, at last, a book.
If life-blood's necessary,—which it is,
(By that blue vein athrob on Mahomet's
brow,
Each prophet-poet's book must show
man's blood !)
If life-blood's fertilising, I wrung mine
On every leaf of this,—unless the drops
Slid heavily on one side and left it dry.
That chances often : many a fervid man
Writes books as cold and flat as grave-
yard stones
From which the lichen's scraped, and if
St. Preux
Had written his own letters, as he might,
We had never wept to think of the little
mole
*Neath Julie's drooping eyelid. Passion
is
But something suffered, after all.

While art
Sets action on the top of suffering :
The artist's part is both to be and do,
Transfixing with a special, central power
The flat experience of the common man,
And turning outward, with a sudden
wrench,
Half agony, half ecstasy, the thing
He feels the inmost : never felt the less
Because he sings it. Does a torch less
burn
For burning next reflectors of blue steel,

That *he* should be the colder for his
place
*Twixt two incessant fires,—his personal
life's,
And that intense refraction which burns
back
Perpetually against him from the round
Of crystal conscience he was born into
If artist-born ? O sorrowful great gift
Conferred on poets, of a twofold life,
When one life has been found enough
for pain !
We staggering 'neath our burden as mere
men,
Being called to stand up straight as
demi-gods,
Support the intolerable strain and stress
Of the universal, and send clearly up
With voices broken by the human sob,
Our poems to find rhymes among the
stars !
But soft !—a 'poet' is a word soon said ;
A book's a thing soon written. Nay,
indeed,
The more the poet shall be questionable,
The more unquestionably comes his
book.
And this of mine—well, granting to my-
self
Some passion in it, furrowing up the
flats,
Mere passion will not prove a volume
worth
Its gall and rags even. Bubbles round
a keel
Mean nought, excepting that the vessel
moves.
There's more than passion goes to make
a man
Or book, which is a man too.
I am sad,
I wonder if Pygmalion had these
doubts,
And, feeling the hard marble first re-
lent,
Grow supple to the straining of his arms,
And tingle through its cold to his burn-
ing lip,
Supposed his senses mocked, and that
the toil
Of stretching past the known and seen
to reach
The archetypal Beauty out of sight,
Had made his heart beat fast enough for
two,

And with his own life dazed and blinded
him !
Not so ; Pygmalion loved,—and whoso
loves
Believes the impossible.

And I am sad :
I cannot thoroughly love a work of
mine,
Since none seems worthy of my thought
and hope
More highly mated. He has shot them
down.

My Phœbus Apollo, soul within my soul,
Who judges by the attempted, what's at-
tained,

And with the silver arrow from his
height

Has struck down all my works before
my face

While I said nothing. Is there aught
to say ?

I call the artist but a greatedened man :
He may be childless also, like a man.

I laboured on alone. The wind and
dust

And sun of the world beat blistering in
my face ;

And hope, now for me, now against me,
dragged

My spirits onward,—as some fallen
balloon,

Which, whether caught by blossoming
tree or bare,

Is torn alike. I sometimes touched my
aim,

Or seemed,—and generous souls cried
out, ' Be strong,

Take courage ; now you're on our level,
—now !

The next step saves you ! ' I was flushed
with praise,

But, pausing just a moment to draw
breath,

I could not choose but murmur to my-
self

' Is this all ? all that's done ? and all
that's gained ?

If this then be success, 'tis dimaller
'Than any failure.'

O my God, my God,
O Supreme Artist, who as sole return
For all the cosmic wonder of Thy work,
Demandest of us just a word . . a name,

' My Father !—thou hast knowledge,
only thou.'

How dreary 'tis for women to sit still
On winter nights by solitary fires,
And hear the nations praising them far
off,

Too far ! ay, praising our quick sense of
love.

Our very heart of passionate woman-
hood,

Which could not beat so in the verse
without

Being present also in the unknissed lips,
And eyes undried because there's none
to ask

The reason they grow moist.

To sit alone,
And think for comfort how, that very
night,

Affianced lovers, leaning face to face
With sweet half-listenings for each other's
breath

Are reading haply from a page of ours,
To pause with a thrill, as if their cheeks
had touched,

When such a stanza, level to their mood,
Seems floating their own thoughts out—

' So I feel
For thee,'—' And I, for thee : this poet
knows

What everlasting love is ! '—how, that
night,

A father, issuing from the misty roads
Upon the luminous round of lamp and
hearth

And happy children, having caught up
first

The youngest there until it shrink and
shriek

To feel the cold chin prick its dimples
through

With winter from the hills, may throw it
the lap

Of the eldest, (who has learnt to drop
her lids

To hide some sweetness newer than last
year's)

Our book and cry, . . ' Ah you, you care
for rhymes ;

So here be rhymes to pore on under
trees,

When April comes to let you ! I've been
told

They are not idle as so many are,

But set hearts beating pure as well as fast :

'Tis yours, the book ; I'll write your name in it,

That so you may not lose, however lost
In poet's lore and charming reverie,
The thought of how your father thought
of *you*

In riding from the town.'

To have our books
Appraised by love, associated with love,
While *we* sit loveless ! is it hard, you
think ?

At least 'tis mournful. Fame, indeed,
'twas said,

Means simply love. It was a man said
that.

And then, there's love and love : the
love of all

(To risk in turn a woman's paradox.)
Is but a small thing to the love of one.

You bid a hungry child be satisfied
With a heritage of many corn-fields :

He says he's hungry,—he would rather
have

That little barley-cake you keep from
him

While reckoning up his harvests. So
with us ;

(Here, Romney, too, we fail to general-
ise !)

We're hungry.

Hungry ! but it's pitiful
To wail like unweaned babes and suck
our thumbs

Because we're hungry. Who, in all this
world,

(Wherein we are haply set to pray and
fast,

And learn what good is by its opposite)
Has never hungered ? Woe to him who
has found

The meal enough : if Ugolino's full,
His teeth have crunched some foul un-
natural thing :

For here satiety proves penury
More utterly irremediable. And since

We needs must hunger, — better, for
man's love

Than God's truth ! better, for compan-
ions sweet,

Than great convictions ! let us bear our
weights,

Preferring dreary hearths to desert
souls.

Well, well, they say we're envious, we
who rhyme :

But I, because I am a woman perhaps,
And so rhyme ill, am ill at envying.

I never envied Graham his breadth of
style,

Which gives you, with a random smutch
or two,

(Near-sighted critics analyse to smutch)
Such delicate perspectives of full life ;

Nor Belmore, for the unity of aim
To which he cuts his cedarn poems, fine

As sketchers do their pencils ; nor Mark
Gage,

For that caressing colour and trancing
tone

Whereby you're swept away and melted
in

The sensual element, which with a back
wave

Restores you to the level of pure souls
And leaves you with Plotinus. None

of these,
For native gifts or popular applause,

I've envied ; but for this,—that when by
chance

Says some one,—' There goes Belmore,
a great man !

He leaves clean work behind him, and
requires

No sweeper up of the chips,' . . a girl
I know,

Who answers nothing, save with her
brown eyes,

Smiles unaware as if a guardian saint
Smiled in her :—for this, too,—that

Gage comes home
And lays his last book's prodigal review

Upon his mother's knees, where, years
ago,

He laid his childish spelling-book and
learned

To chirp and peck the letters from her
mouth,

As young birds must. ' Well done,' she
murmured then,

She will not say it now more wonder-
ingly ;

And yet the last ' Well done,' will touch
him more,

As catching up to-day and yesterday
In a perfect cord of love ; and so, Mark
Gage,

I envy you your mother !—and you, Graham,
 Because you have a wife who loves you
 so,
 She half forgets, at moments, to be
 proud
 Of being Graham's wife, until a friend
 observes,
 'The boy here, has his father's massive
 brow,
 Done small in wax . . if we push back
 the curls.'

Who loves *me*? Dearest father,—mother
 sweet,—
 I speak the names out sometimes by
 myself,
 And make the silence shiver: they
 sound strange,
 As Hindostanee to an Ind-born man
 Accustomed many years to English
 speech;
 Or lovely poet-words grown obsolete,
 Which will not leave off singing. Up
 in heaven
 I have my father,—with my mother's
 face
 Beside him in a blotch of heavenly
 light;
 No more for earth's familiar household
 use,
 No more! The best verse written by
 this hand,
 Can never reach them where they sit, to
 seem
 Well-done to *them*. Death quite unfellows us,
 Sets dreadful odds betwixt the live and
 dead,
 And makes us part as those at Babel did
 Through sudden ignorance of a common
 tongue.
 A living Cæsar would not dare to play
 At bowls with such as my dead father
 is.

And yet this may be less so than appears,
 This change and separation. Sparrows
 five
 For just two farthings, and God cares
 for each.
 If God is not too great for little cares,
 Is any creature, because gone to God?

I've seen some men, veracious, nowise
 mad,
 Who have thought or dreamed, declared and testified,
 They heard the Dead a ticking like a
 clock
 Which strikes the hours of the eternities,
 Beside them, with their natural ears, and
 know,
 That human spirits feel the human way,
 And hate the unreasoning awe which
 waves them off
 From possible communion. It may be.

At least, earth separates as well as
 heaven.
 For instance, I have not seen Romney
 Leigh
 Full eighteen months . . add six, you
 get two years.
 They say he's very busy with good
 works,—
 Has parted Leigh Hall into almshouses.
 He made an almshouse of his heart one
 day,
 Which ever since is loose upon the latch
 For those who pull the string.—I never
 did.

It always makes me sad to go abroad;
 And now I'm sadder that I went to-
 night
 Among the lights and talkers at Lord
 Howe's.
 His wife is gracious, with her glossy
 braids,
 And even voice, and gorgeous eyeballs,
 calm
 As her other jewels. If she's somewhat
 cold,
 Who wonders, when her blood has stood
 so long
 In the ducal reservoir she calls her line
 By no means arrogantly? she's not
 proud:
 Not prouder than the swan is of the
 lake
 He has always swum in;—'tis her element,
 And so she takes it with a natural grace,
 Ignoring tadpoles. She just knows per-
 haps
 There *are* who travel without outriders,

Which isn't her fault. Ah, to watch
her face,
When good Lord Howe expounds his
theories
Of social justice and equality—
'Tis curious, what a tender, tolerant
bend
Her neck takes: for she loves him,
likes his talk,
'Such clever talk—that dear, odd Alger-
non !'
She listens on, exactly as if he talked
Some Scandinavian myth of Lemures,
'Too pretty to dispute, and too absurd.

She's gracious to me as her husband's
friend,
And would be gracious, were I not a
Leigh,
Being used to smile just so, without her
eyes,
On Joseph Strangways, the Leeds mes-
merist,
And Delia Dobbs, the lecturer from 'the
States'
Upon the 'Woman's question.' Then,
for him,
I like him . . . he's my friend. And all
the rooms
Were full of crinkling silks that swept
about
The fine dust of most subtle courtesies.
What then?—why then, we come home
to be sad.
How lovely One I love not looked to-
night !
She's very pretty, Lady Waldemar.
Her maid must use both hands to twist
that coil
Of tresses, then be careful lest the rich
Bronze rounds should slip :—she missed,
though, a gray hair,
A single one,—I saw it ; otherwise
The woman looked immortal. How
they told,
Those alabaster shoulders and bare
breasts,
On which the pearls, drowned out of
sight in milk,
Were lost, excepting for the ruby-clasp !
They split the amaranth velvet-boddice
down
To the waist or nearly, with the auda-
cious press

Of full-breathed beauty. If the heart
within
Were half as white !—but, if it were,
perhaps
The breasts were closer covered, and the
sight
Less aspectable, by half, too.

I heard
The young man with the German stu-
dent's look—
A sharp face, like a knife in a cleft stick,
Which shot up straight against the part-
ing line
So equally dividing the long hair,—
Say softly to his neighbor, (thirty-five
And mediæval) 'Look that way, Sir
Blaise.
She's Lady Waldemar—to the left,—in
red—
Whom Romney Leigh, our ablest man
just now,
Is soon about to marry.'

Then replied
Sir Blaise Delorme, with quiet, priestlike
voice,
Too used to syllable damnations round
To make a natural emphasis worth
while :
'Is Leigh your ablest man? the same, I
think,
Once jilted by a recreant pretty maid
Adopted from the people? Now, in
change,
He seems to have plucked a flower from
the other side
Of the social hedge.'

'A flower, a flower,' exclaimed
My German student,—his own eyes full-
blown
Bent on her. He was twenty, certainly.

Sir Blaise resumed with gentle arro-
gance,
As if he had dropped his alms into a hat
And gained the right to counsel,—My
young friend,
I doubt your ablest man's ability
To get the least good or help meet for
him,
For pagan phalanstery or Christian
home,
From such a flowery creature.'

'Beautiful !'
My student murmured, rapt,—'Mark
how she stirs !

Just waves her head, as if a flower indeed,
Touched far off by the vain breath of
our talk.'

At which that bilious Grimwald, (he
who writes
For the Renovator) who had seemed
absorbed

Upon the table-book of autographs,
(I dare say mentally he crunched the
bones

Of all those writers, wishing them alive
To feel his tooth in earnest) turned short
round

With low carnivorous laugh,—‘a flower,
of course !

She neither sews nor spins,—and takes
no thought

Of her garments . . . falling off.’

The student flinched,
Sir Blaise, the same ; then both, drawing
back their chairs

As if they spied black-beetles on the
floor,

Pursued their talk, without a word being
thrown

To the critic.

Good Sir Blaise’s brow is high
And noticeably narrow : a strong wind,
You fancy, might unroof him suddenly,
And blow that great top attic off his
head

So piled with feudal relics. You admire
His nose in profile, though you miss his
chin ;

But, though you miss his chin, you seldom
miss

His ebony cross worn innermost,ly,
(carved

For penance by a saintly Styrian monk
Whose flesh was too much with him,) slipping
through

Some unaware unbuttoned casualty
Of the under-waistcoat. With an absent
air

Sir Blaise sate fingering it and speaking
low,

While I, upon the sofa, heard it all.

‘ My dear young friend, if we could bear
our eyes

Like blesseddest St. Lucy, on a plate,
They would not trick us into choosing
wives,

As doublets, by the colour. Otherwise
Our fathers chose,—and therefore, when
they had hung

Their household keys about a lady’s
waist,

The sense of duty gave her dignity :
She kept her bosom holy to her babes ;

And, if a moralist reproved her dress,
’Twas, ‘ Too much starch ! ’—and not,
‘ Too little lawn ! ’

‘ Now, pshaw ! ’ returned the other in a
heat,

A little fretted by being called ‘ young
friend,’

Or so I took it,—‘ for St. Lucy’s sake,
If she’s the saint to swear by, let us
leave

Our fathers,—plagued enough about
our sons ! ’

(He stroked his beardless chin) ‘ yes,
plagued, sir, plagued :

The future generations lie on us

As heavy as the nightmare of a seer ;

Our meat and drink grow painful proph-
ecy :

I ask you,—have we leisure, if we liked,
To hollow out our weary hands to keep

Your intermittent rushlight of the past
From draughts in lobbies ? Prejudice
of sex

And marriage-law . . . the socket drops
them through

While we two speak,—however may
protest

Some over-delicate nostrils, like your
own,

’Gainst odours thence arising.’

‘ You are young,’

Sir Blaise objected.

‘ If I am,’ he said

With fire,—‘ though somewhat less so
than I seem,

The young run on before, and see the
thing

That’s coming. Reverence for the young,
I cry.

In that new church for which the world’s
near ripe,

You’ll have the younger in the Elder’s
chair,

Presiding with his ivory front of hope
O’er foreheads clawed by cruel carrion-
birds

Of life’s experience.’

'Pray your blessing, sir,'

Sir Blaise replied good-humouredly,—'I plucked

A silver hair this morning from my beard,
Which left me your inferior. Would I were

Eighteen and worthy to admonish you !
If young men of your order run before
To see such sights as sexual prejudice
And marriage-law dissolved,—in plainer words,

A general concubinage expressed
In a universal pruriency,—the thing
Is scarce worth running fast for, and
you'd gain

By loitering with your elders.'

'Ah,' he said,

'Who, getting to the top of Pisgah-hill,
Can talk with one at bottom of the view,
To make it comprehensible? Why, Leigh

Himself, although our ablest man, I said,

Is scarce advanced to see as far as this,
Which some are: he takes up imperfectly

The social question—by one handle—leaves

The rest to trail. A Christian socialist,
Is Romney Leigh, you understand.'

'Not I.

I disbelieve in Christian-pagans, much
As you in women-fishes. If we mix
Two colours, we lose both, and make a third

Distinct from either. Mark you! to mistake

A colour is the sign of a sick brain,
And mine, I thank the saints, is clear
and cool:

A neutral tint is here impossible.

The church,—and by the church, I mean
of course

The catholic, apostolic, mother-church,—
Draws lines as plain and straight as her
own wall;

Inside of which, are Christians, obviously,

And outside . . . dogs.'

'We thank you. Well I know

The ancient mother-church would fain
still bite,

For all her toothless gums,—as Leigh
himself

Would fain be a Christian still, for all
his wit;

Pass that; you two may settle it, for me.
You're slow in England. In a month I
learnt

At Gottingen enough philosophy
To stock your English schools for fifty
years;

Pass that, too. Here alone, I stop you
short,

—Supposing a true man like Leigh could
stand

Unequal in the stature of his life
To the height of his opinions. Choose
a wife

Because of a smooth skin?—not he, not
he!

He'd rail at Venus' self for creaking
shoes,

Unless she walked his way of righteousness;

And if he takes a Venus Meretrix,
(No imputation on the lady there)

Be sure that, by some sleight of Christian art.

He has metamorphosed and converted
her

To a Blessed Virgin.'

'Soft!' Sir Blaise drew breath
As if it hurt him,—'Soft! no blasphemy,
I pray you!'

'The first Christians did the thing;
Why not the last?' asked he of Gottingen,

With just that shade of sneering on the
lip,

Compensates for the lagging of the
beard,—

'And so the case is. If that fairest fair
Is talked of as the future wife of Leigh,
She's talked of too, at least as certainly,
As Leigh's disciple. You may find her
name

On all his missions and commissions,
schools,

Asylums, hospitals,—he had her down,
With other ladies whom her starry lead
Persuaded from their spheres, to his
country-place

In Shropshire, to the famed phalanstery
At Leigh Hall, christianised from Fourier's own,

(In which he has planted out his sapling
stocks

Of knowledge into social nurseries)

And there, they say, she has tarried half
a week,
And milked the cows, and churned, and
pressed the curd,
And said 'my sister' to the lowest drab
Of all the assembled castaways; such
girls!
Ay, sided with them at the washing-
tub—
Conceive, Sir Blaise, those naked perfect
arms,
Round glittering arms, plunged elbow-
deep in suds,
Like wild swans hid in lilies all a-shake.'

Lord Howe came up. 'What, talking
poetry
So near the image of the unfavoring
Muse?
That's you, Miss Leigh: I've watched
you half an hour,
Precisely as I watched the statue called
A Pallas in the Vatican;—you mind
The face, Sir Blaise?—intensely calm and
sad,
As wisdom cut it off from fellowship,—
But *that* spoke louder. Not a word
from *you*!
And these two gentlemen were bold, I
marked,
And unabashed by even your silence.'

'Ah,'

Said I, 'my dear Lord Howe, you shall
not speak
To a printing woman who has lost her
place,
(The sweet safe corner of the household
fire
Behind the heads of children) compli-
ments
As if she were a woman. We who have
clipt
The curls before our eyes, may see at
least
As plain as men do: speak out, man to
man;
No compliments, beseech you'
 'Friend to friend,
Let that be. We are sad to-night, I
saw,
(—Good night, Sir Blaise! Ah, Smith
—he has slipped away)
I saw you across the room, and stayed,
Miss Leigh,
To keep a crowd of lion-hunters off,

With faces toward your jungle. There
were three;
A spacious lady, five feet ten and fat,
Who has the devil in her (and there's
room)

For walking to and fro upon the earth,
From Chippewa to China; she requires
Your autograph upon a tinted leaf
'Twixt Queen Pomare's and Emperor
Soulouque's:

Pray give it; she has energies, though
fat:

For me, I'd rather see a rick on fire
Than such a woman angry. Then a
youth

Fresh from the backwoods, green as the
underboughs,

Asks modestly, Miss Leigh, to kiss your
shoe,

And adds, he has an epic in twelve
parts,

Which when you've read, you'll do it for
his boot,—

All which I saved you, and absorb next
week

Both manuscript and man,—because a
lord

Is still more potent than a poetess
With any extreme republican. Ah, ah,
You smile at last, then.'

'Thank you.'

'Leave the smile.

I'll lose the thanks for't,—ay, and throw
you in

My transatlantic girl, with golden eyes,
That draw you to her splendid white-
ness as

The pistil of a water-lily draws,
Adust with gold. Those girls across the
sea

Are tyrannously pretty,—and I swore
(She seemed to me an innocent, frank
girl)

To bring her to you for a woman's kiss,
Not now, but on some other day or
week:

—We'll call it perjury; I give her up.'

'No, bring her.'

'Now,' said he, 'you make it hard
To touch such goodness with a girmy
palm.

I thought to tease you well, and fret you
cross,

And steel myself, when rightly vexed
with you,
For telling you a thing to tease you more.'

'Of Romney?'

'No, no; nothing worse,' he cried,
'Of Romney Leigh than what is buzzed
about,—

That *he* is taken in an eye-trap too.
Like many half as wise. The thing I
mean
Refers to you, not him.'

'Refers to me.'

He echoed,—'Me! You sound it like
a stone

Dropped down a dry well very listlessly
By one who never thinks about the toad
Alive at the bottom. Presently perhaps
You'll sound your 'me' more proudly—
till I shrink.'

'Lord Howe's the toad, then, in this
question?'

'Brief,

We'll take it graver. Give me sofa-
room,

And quiet hearing. You know Eglinton,
ton,

John Eglinton, of Eglinton in Kent?'

'Is *he* the toad?—he's rather like the
snail:

Known chiefly for the house upon his
back:

Divide the man and house—you kill the
man:

That's Eglinton of Eglinton, Lord
Howe.'

He answered grave. 'A reputable man,
An excellent landlord of the olden
stamp,

If somewhat slack in new philanthro-
pies;

Who keeps his birthdays with a tenants'
dance,

Is hard upon them when they miss the
church

Or hold their children back from cate-
chism,

But not ungentle when the aged poor
Pick sticks at hedge-sides: nay, I've
heard him say,

The old dame has a twinge because
she stoops;

'That's punishment enough for felony.'

'O tender-hearted landlord! May I
take

My long lease with him, when the time
arrives

For gathering winter faggots!'

'He likes art,
Buys books and pictures . . of a certain
kind;

Neglects no patent duty; a good son' . .

'To a most obedient mother. Born to
wear

His father's shoes, she wears her hus-
band's too:

Indeed I've heard it's touching. Dear
Lord Howe,

You shall not praise *me* so against your
heart,

When I'm at worst for praise and fag-
gots.'

'Be

Less bitter with me, for . . in short,' he
said,

'I have a letter, which he urged me so
To bring you . . I could scarcely choose
but yield;

Insisting that a new love passing through
The hand of an old friendship, caught
from it

Some reconciling odour.'

'Love, you say?

My lord, I cannot love. I only find
The rhyme for love,—and that's not love,
my lord.

Take back your letter.'

'Pause: you'll read it first?'

'I will not read it: it is stereotyped;
The same he wrote to,—anybody's
name,

Anne Blythe the actress, when she died
so true,

A duchess fainted in a private box:
Pauline the dancer, after the great *pas*

In which her little feet winked over-
head

Like other fireflies, and amazed the pit:
Or Baldinacci, when her F in alt

Had touched the silver tops of heaven
itself

With such a pungent spirit-dart, the
Queen

Laid softly, each to each, her white-gloved palms,
 And sighed for joy : or else (I thank your friend)
 Aurora Leigh,—when some indifferent rhymes,
 Like those the boys sang round the holy ox
 On Memphis-highway, chance perhaps to set
 Our Apis-public lowing. Oh, he wants,
 Instead of any worthy wife at home,
 A star upon his stage of Eglinton !
 Advise him that he is not overshrewd
 In being so little modest : a dropped star
 Makes bitter waters, says a book I've read,—
 And there's his unread letter.'
 'My dear friend,'
 Lord Howe began . . .
 In haste I tore the phrase.
 'You mean your friend of Eglinton, or me?'
 'I mean you, you,' he answered with some fire.
 'A happy life means prudent compromise :
 The tare runs through the farmer's garnered sheaves :
 But though the gleaner's apron holds pure wheat,
 We count her poorer. Tare with wheat, we cry,
 And good with drawbacks. You, you love your art,
 And, certain of vocation, set your soul
 On utterance. Only, . . . in this world
 we have made,
 (They say God made it first, but if He did
 'Twas so long since, . . . and, since, we have spoiled it so,
 He scarce would know it, if He looked this way,
 From hells we preach of, with the flames blown out,)
 In this bad, twisted, topsy-turvy world,
 Where all the heaviest wrongs get uppermost,—
 In this uneven, unfostering England here,
 Where ledger-strokes and sword-strokes count indeed,

But, soul-strokes merely tell upon the flesh
 They strike from,—it is hard to stand for art,
 Unless some golden tripod from the sea
 Be fished up, by Apollo's divine chance,
 To throne such feet as yours, my proph-
 etess,
 At Delphi. Think,—the god comes down as fierce
 As twenty bloodhounds ! shakes you, strangles you,
 Until the oracular shriek shall ooze in froth !
 At best 'tis not all ease,—at worst too hard :
 A place to stand on is a 'vantage gained,
 And here's your tripod. To be plain, dear friend,
 You're poor, except in what you richly give ;
 You labour for your own bread painfully,
 Or ere you pour our wine. For art's sake, pause.'

I answered slow,—as some wayfaring man,
 Who feels himself at night too far from home,
 Makes steadfast face against the bitter wind.
 'Is art so less a thing than virtue is,
 That artists first must cater for their ease
 Or ever they make issue past themselves
 To generous use? alas, and is it so,
 That we, who would be somewhat clean, must sweep
 Our ways as well as walk them, and no friend
 Confirm us nobly,—'Leave results to God,
 But you, be clean?' What ! 'prudent compromise
 Makes acceptable life,' you say, instead,
 You, you, Lord Howe?—in things in-different, well.
 For instance, compromise the wheaten bread
 For rye, the meat for lentils, silk for serge,
 And sleep on down, if needs, for sleep on straw ;

But there, end compromise. I will not
bate
One artist-dream on straw or down, my
lord,
Nor pinch my liberal soul, though I be
poor,
Nor cease to love high, though I live
thus low.'

So speaking, with less anger in my voice
Than sorrow, I rose quickly to depart ;
While he, thrown back upon the noble
shame

Of such high-stumbling natures, mur-
mured words,

The right words after wrong ones. Ah,
the man

Is worthy, but so given to entertain
Impossible plans of superhuman life,—
He sets his virtues on so raised a shelf,
To keep them at the grand millennial
height,

He has to mount a stool to get at them ;
And meantime, lives on quite the com-
mon way,

With everybody's morals.

As we passed,

Lord Howe insisting that his friendly
arm

Should oar me across the sparkling
brawling stream

Which swept from room to room, we fell
at once

On Lady Waldemar. 'Miss Leigh,' she
said,

And gave me such a smile, so cold and
bright,

As if she tried it in a 'tiring glass
And liked it ; 'all to-night I've strained

at you,

As babes at bangles held up out of reach
By spiteful nurses, ('Never snatch,'
they say,)

And there you sate, most perfectly shut
in

By good Sir Blaise and clever Mister
Smith,

And then our dear Lord Howe ! at last
indeed

I almost snatched. I have a world to
speak

About your cousin's place in Shropshire,
where

I've been to see his work . . our work,—
you heard

I went? . . and of a letter yesterday,
In which, if I should read a page or
two,

You might feel interest, though you're
locked of course

In literary toil.—You'll like to hear
Your last book lies at the phalanstery,
As judged innocuous for the elder girls
And younger women who still care for
books.

We all must read, you see, before we
live :

But slowly the ineffable light comes up.
And, as it deepens, drowns the written
word,—

So said your cousin, while we stood and
felt

A sunset from his favourite beech-tree
seat :

He might have been a poet if he would,
But then he saw the higher thing at once
And climbed to it. I think he looks well
now,

Has quite got over that unfortunate . .
Ah, ah . . I know it moved you. 'Tender-
heart !

You took a liking to the wretched girl.
Perhaps you thought the marriage suit-
able,

Who knows? a poet hankers for ro-
mance,

And so on. As for Romney Leigh, 'tis
sure

He never loved her,—never. By the
way,

You have not heard of *her*? . . quite
out of sight,

And out of saving? lost in every sense?'

She might have gone on talking half-an
hour,

And I stood still, and cold, and pale, I
think,

As a garden-statue a child pelts with
snow

For pretty pastime. Every now and
then

I put in 'yes' or 'no,' I scarce knew
why ;

The blind man walks wherever the dog
pulls,

And so I answered. Till Lord Howe
broke in :

'What penance takes the wretch who in-
terrupts

The talk of charming women? I, at last,
Must brave it. Pardon, Lady Waldemar!

The lady on my arm is tired, unwell,
And loyally I've promised she shall say
Nor harder word this evening, than . . .
goodnight;

The rest her face speaks for her.—Then
we went.

And I breathe large at home. I drop
my cloak,
Unclass my girdle, loose the band that
ties

My hair . . . now could I but unloose my
soul!

We are sepulchered alive in this close
world,

And want more room.

The charming woman there—
This reckoning up and writing down her
talk

Affects me singularly. How she talked
To pain me! woman's spite!—You wear
steel-mail;

A woman takes a housewife from her
breast,

And plucks the delicatest needle out
As 'twere a rose, and pricks you care-
fully

'Neath nails, 'neath eyelids, in your nos-
trils,—say,

A beast would roar so tortured,—but a
man,

A human creature, must not, shall not
flinch,

No, not for shame.

What vexes after all,
Is just that such as she, with such as I,
Knows how to vex. Sweet heaven, she
takes me up

As if she had fingered me and dog-eared
me

And spelled me by the fireside half a
life!

She knows my turns, my feeble points.
—What then?

The knowledge of a thing implies the
thing;

Of course, she found *that* in me, she saw
that,

Her pencil underscored *this* for a fault,
And I, still ignorant. Shut the book up
—close!

And crush that beetle in the leaves.

O heart,
At last we shall grow hard too, like the
rest.

And call it self defence because we are
soft.

And after all, now, . . . why should I be
pained

That Romney Leigh, my cousin, should
espouse

This Lady Waldemar? And, say, she
held

Her newly-blossomed gladness in my
face, . . .

'Twas natural surely, if not generous,
Considering how, when winter held her
fast,

I helped the frost with mine, and pained
her more

Than she pains me. Pains me!—but
wherefore pained?

'Tis clear my cousin Romney wants a
wife,—

So, good!—The man's need of the
woman, here,

Is greater than the woman's of the man,
And easier served; for where the man
discerns

A sex, (ah, ah, the man can generalise,
Said he) we see but one, ideally

And really: where we yearn to lose our-
selves

And melt like white pearls in another's
wine,

He seeks to double himself by what he
loves,

And make his drink more costly by our
pearls.

At board, at bed, at work and holiday,
It is not good for man to be alone,

And that's his way of thinking, first and
last;

And thus my cousin Romney wants a
wife.

But then my cousin sets his dignity
On personal virtue. If he understands
By love, like others, self-aggrandise-
ment,

It is that he may verily be great
By doing rightly and kindly. Once he
thought,

For charitable ends set duly forth

In heaven's white judgment-book, to
 marry . . ah,
 We'll call her name Aurora Leigh, al-
 though
 She's changed since then!—and once,
 for social ends,
 Poor Marian Erle, my sister Marian
 Erle,
 My woodland sister, sweet Maid Marian,
 Whose memory moans on in me like the
 wind
 Through ill-shut casements, making me
 more sad
 Than ever I find reasons for. Alas,
 Poor pretty plaintive face, embodied
 ghost,
 He finds it easy then, to clap thee off
 From pulling at his sleeve and book and
 pen,—
 He locks thee out at night into the cold,
 Away from butting with thy horny eyes
 Against his crystal dreams,—that now
 he's strong
 To love anew? that Lady Waldemar
 Succeeds my Marian?

After all, why not?
 He loved not Marian, more than once
 he loved
 Aurora. If he loves at last that Third,
 Albeit she prove as slippery as spilt oil
 On marble floors, I will not augur him
 Ill luck for that. Good love, howe'er
 ill-placed,
 Is better for a man's soul in the end,
 Than if he loved ill what deserves love
 well.
 A pagan, kissing for a step of Pan
 The wild-goat's hoof-print on the loamy
 down,
 Exceeds our modern thinker who turns
 back
 The strata . . granite, limestone, coal
 and clay,
 Concluding coldly with, 'Here's law!
 Where's God?'

And then at worse,—if Romney loves
 her not,—
 At worst,—if he's incapable of love,
 Which may be—then indeed, for such a
 man
 Incapable of love, she's good enough;
 For she, at worst too, is a woman still

And loves him . . as the sort of woman
 can.

My loose long hair began to burn and
 creep,
 Alive to the very ends, about my knees:
 I swept it backward as the wind sweeps
 flame,
 With the passion of my hands. Ah,
 Romney laughed
 One day . . (how full the memories come
 up!)
 '—Your Florence fire-flies live on in
 your hair,'
 He said, 'It gleams so.' Well, I wrung
 them out,
 My fire-flies; made a knot as hard as
 life
 Of those loose, soft, impracticable curls,
 And then sat down and thought . .
 'She shall not think
 Her thoughts of me,'—and drew my
 desk and wrote.

'Dear Lady Waldemar, I could not
 speak
 With people round me, nor can sleep to-
 night
 And not speak, after the great news I
 heard
 Of you and of my cousin. May you
 be
 Most happy; and the good he meant
 the world,
 Replenish his own life. Say what I
 say,
 And let my word be sweeter for your
 mouth,
 As you are *you* . . I only Aurora Leigh.'

That's quiet, guarded. Though she hold
 it up
 Against the light, she'll not see through
 it more
 Than lies there to be seen. So much for
 pride;
 And now for peace, a little! Let me
 stop
 All writing back . . 'Sweet thanks, my
 sweetest friend,
 You've made more joyful my great joy
 itself.'
 —No, that's too simple! she would
 twist it thus,

Of my long poem, if 'twere sold outright,
Would fetch enough to buy me shoes, to
go

A-foot, (thrown in, the necessary patch
For the other side the Alps)? it cannot
be :

I fear that I must sell this residue
Of my father's books; although the
Elzevirs

Have fly-leaves over-written by his
hand

In faded notes as thick and fine and
brown

As cobwebs on a tawny monument
Of the Old Greeks—*conferenda hæc
cum his*—

Corrupte citat—lege potius,
And so on, in the scholar's regal way
Of giving judgment on the parts of
speech,

As if he sate on all twelve thrones up-
piled,

Arraigning Israel. Ay, but books and
notes

Must go together. And this Proclus too
In these dear quaint contracted Grecian
types,

Fantastically crumpled, like his thoughts
Which would not seem too plain; you
go round twice

For one step forward, then you take it
back

Because you're somewhat giddy;
there's the rule

For Proclus. Ah, I stained this middle
leaf

With pressing in't my Florence iris-
bell,

Long stalk and all; my father chided
me

For that stain of blue blood,—I recol-
lect

The peevish turn his voice took,—' Sil-
ly girls,

Who plant their flowers in our philoso-
phy

To make it fine, and only spoil the
book!

No more of it, Aurora.' Yes—no more!
Ah, blame of love, that's sweeter than
all praise

Of those who love not! 'tis so lost on
me,

I cannot, in such beggared life, afford

To lose my Proclus. Not for Florence
even.

The kissing Judas, Wolff, shall go in-
stead,

Who builds us such a royal book as
this

To honour a chief-poet, folio-built,
And writes above, 'The house of No-
body:'

Who floats in cream, as rich as any
sucked

From Juno's breasts, the broad Home-
ric lines,

And, while with their spondaic prodig-
ious mouths

They lap the lucent margins as babe-
gods,

Proclaims them bastards. Wolff's an
atheist;

And if the Iliad fell out, as he says,
By mere fortuitous concourse of old
songs,

Conclude as much too for the universe.

That Wolff, those Platos: sweep the
upper shelves

As clean as this, and so I am almost
rich,

Which means, not forced to think of
being poor

In sight of ends. To-morrow: no de-
lay.

I'll wait in Paris till good Carrington
Dispose of such, and, having chaffered
for

My book's price with the publisher, di-
rect

All proceeds to me. Just a line to ask
His help.

And now I come, my Italy,
My own hills! Are you 'ware of me,
my hills,

How I burn toward you? do you feel
to-night

The urgency and yearning of my soul,
As sleeping mothers feel the sucking
babe

And smile?—Nay, not so much as when
in heat

Vain lightnings catch at your inviolate
tops

And tremble while ye are stedfast. Still,
ye go

Your own determined, calm, indifferent
 way
 Toward sunrise, shade by shade, and
 light by light ;
 Of all the grand progression nought left
 out ;
 As if God verily made you for your-
 selves,
 And would not interrupt your life with
 ours.

SIXTH BOOK.

THE English have a scornful insular way
 Of calling the French light. The lev-
 ity
 Is in the judgment only, which yet
 stands ;
 For say a foolish thing but oft enough
 (And here's the secret of a hundred
 creeds,

Men get opinions as boys learn to spell,
 By re-iteration chiefly) the same thing
 Shall pass at last for absolutely wise,
 And not with fools exclusively. And so
 We say the French are light, as if we
 said

The cat mews or the milch-cow gives
 us milk :

Say rather, cats are milked and milch-
 cows mew ;

For what is lightness but inconsequence,
 Vague fluctuation 'twixt effect and
 cause,

Compelled by neither? Is a bullet
 light,

That dashes from the gun-mouth, while
 the eye

Winks and the heart beats one, to flat-
 ten itself

To a wafer on the whitespeck on a
 wall

A hundred paces off? Even so direct,
 So sternly undivertible of aim,
 Is this French people.

All idealists
 Too absolute and earnest, with them all
 The idea of a knife cuts real flesh ;
 And still, devouring the safe interval
 Which nature placed between the
 thought and act

With those too fiery and impatient
 souls,

They threaten conflagration to the world
 And rush with most unscrupulous logic
 on

Impossible practice. Set your orators
 To blow upon them with loud windy
 mouths

Through watchword phrases, jest or
 sentiment,
 Which drives our burley brutal English
 mobs

Like so much chaff, whichever way
 they blow,—

This light French people will not thus
 be driven.

They turn indeed ; but then they turn
 upon

Some central pivot of their thought and
 choice,

And veer out by the force of holding
 fast.

—That's hard to understand, for En-
 glishmen

Unused to abstract questions, and un-
 trained

To trace the involutions, valve by valve,
 In each orb'd bulb-root of a general
 truth,

And mark what subtly fine integument
 Divides opposed compartments. Free-
 dom's self

Comes concrete to us, to be understood.
 Fixed in a feudal form incarnately

To suit our ways of thought and reve-
 rence,

The special form, with us, being still
 the thing.

With us, I say, though I'm of Italy
 By mother's birth and grave, by father's
 grave

And memory ; let it be,—a poet's heart
 Can swell to a pair of nationalities,
 However ill-lodged in a woman's
 breast.

And so I am strong to love this noble
 France,

This poet of the nations, who dreams on
 And wails on (while the household goes
 to wreck)

For ever, after some ideal good,—
 Some equal poise of sex, some unvoiced
 love

Inviolate, some spontaneous brotherhood.

Some wealth, that leaves none poor and finds none tired,

Some freedom of the many that respects
The wisdom of the few. Heroic dreams!

Sublime, to dream so; natural, to wake:
And sad, to use such lofty scaffoldings,
Erected for the building of a church,
To build instead a brothel . . or a prison—

May God save France!

And if at last she sighs

Her great soul up into a great man's face,

To flush his temples out so gloriously
That few dare carp at Cæsar for being bald,

What then?—this Cæsar represents, not reigns,

And is no despot, though twice absolute:

This Head has all the people for a heart;

This purple's lined with the democracy,—

Now let him see to it! for a rent within
Must leave irreparable rags without.

A serious riddle: find such anywhere
Except in France; and when 'tis found
in France,

Be sure to read it rightly. So, I mused
Up and down, up and down, the terraced streets,

The glittering Boulevards, the white colonnades

Of fair fantastic Paris who wears trees
Like plumes, as if man made them, spire and tower

As if they had grown by nature, tossing up

Her fountains in the sunshine of the squares,

As if in beauty's game she tossed the dice,

Or blew the silver down-balls of her dreams

To sow futurity with the seeds of thought
And count the passage of her festive hours.

The city swims in verdure, beautiful

As Venice on the waters, the sea-swan.
What bosky gardens dropped in close-walled courts

As plums in ladies' laps, who start and laugh:

What miles of streets that run on after trees,

Still carrying all the necessary shops,
Those open caskets with the jewels seen!
And trade is art, and art's philosophy,
In Paris. There's a silk, for instance, there,

As worth an artist's study for the folds,
As that bronze opposite! nay, the bronze has faults;

Art's here too artful,—conscious as a maid

Who leans to mark her shadow on the wall

Until she lose a 'vantage in her step.

Yet Art walks forward, and knows where to walk:

The artists also are idealists,

Too absolute for nature, logical

To austerity in the application of

The special theory: not a soul content

To paint a crooked pollard and an ass,
As the English will, because they find it so

And like it somehow.—There the old Tuileries

Is pulling its high cap down on its eyes,
Confounded, conscience-stricken, and amazed

By the apparition of a new fair face
In those devouring mirrors. Through the grave

Within the gardens, what a heap of babes,

Swept up like leaves beneath the chestnut trees

From every street and alley of the town,
By ghosts perhaps that blow too bleak this way

A-looking for their heads! Dear pretty babes,

I wish them luck to have their ball-play out

Before the next change. Here the air is thronged

With statues poised upon their columns fine,

As if to stand a moment were a feat,

Against that blue! What squares!
 what breathing-room
 For a nation that runs fast,—ay, runs
 against
 The dentist's teeth at the corner in pale
 rows,
 Which grin at progress in an epigram.

I walked the day out, listening to the
 chink
 Of the first Napoleon's dry bones in his
 second grave
 By victories guarded 'neath the golden
 dome
 That caps all Paris like a bubble. 'Shall
 These dry bones live,' thought Louis
 Philippe once,
 And lived to know. Herein is argu-
 ment
 For kings and politicians, but still more
 For poets, who bear buckets to the well
 Of ampler draught.

These crowds are very good
 For meditation, (when we are very
 strong)
 Though love of beauty makes us timor-
 ous,
 And draws us backward from the coarse
 town-sights
 To count the daisies upon dappled fields,
 And hear the streams bleat on among
 the hills
 In innocent and indolent repose ;
 While still with silken elegiac thoughts
 We wind out from us the distracting
 world
 And die into the chrysalis of a man,
 And leave the best that may, to come of
 us
 In some brown moth. I would be bold
 and bear
 To look into the swarthiest face of things.
 For God's sake who has made them.

Six days' work ;
 The last day shutting 'twixt its dawn
 and eve,
 The whole work bettered of the pre-
 vious five!
 Since God collected and resumed in
 man

The firmaments, the strata, and the
 lights,
 Fish, fowl, and beast, and insect,—all
 their trains
 Of various life caught back upon His
 arm,
 Reorganised, and constituted MAN,
 The microcosm, the adding up of works ;
 Within whose fluttering nostrils, then,
 at last
 Consummating Himself the Maker sigh-
 ed,
 As some strong winner at the foot race
 sighs
 Touching the goal.

Humanity is great ;
 And, if I would not rather pour upon
 An ounce of common, ugly, human dust,
 An artisan's palm or a peasant's brow,
 Unsmooth, ignoble, save to me and God,
 Than track old Nilus to his silver roots,
 And wait on all the changes of the
 moon

Among the mountain-peaks of Thessaly,
 (Until her magic crystal round itself
 For many a witch to see in)—set it down
 As weakness,—strength by no means.

How is this
 That men of science, osteologists
 And surgeons, beat some poets in respect
 For nature,—count nought common or
 unclean,
 Spend raptures upon perfect specimens
 Of indurated veins, distorted joints,
 Or beautiful new cases of curved spine ;
 While we, we are shocked at nature's
 falling off,
 We dare to shrink back from her warts
 and blains,
 We will not, when she sneezes, look at
 her,

Not even to say, 'God bless her' ?
 That's our wrong,
 For that, she will not trust us often with
 Her larger sense of beauty and desire,
 But tethers us to a lily or a rose
 And bids us diet on the dew inside,
 Left ignorant that the hungry beggar-
 boy
 (Who stares unseen against our absent
 eyes,
 And wonders at the gods that we must
 be,
 To pass so carelessly for the oranges !)

Bears yet a breastful of a fellow-world
 To this world, undisparaged, unde-
 spoiled,
 And (while we scorn him for a flower or
 two,
 As being, Heaven help us, less poetical)
 Contains himself both flowers and fir-
 maments
 And surging seas and aspectable stars
 And all that we would push him out of
 sight
 In order to see nearer. Let us pray
 God's grace to keep God's image in re-
 pute :
 That so the poet and philanthropist
 (Even I and Romney) may stand side
 by side,
 Because we both stand face to face with
 men
 Contemplating the people in the rough,
 Yet each so follow a vocation,—his
 And mine.

I walked on, musing with myself
 On life and art, and whether after all
 A larger metaphysics might not help
 Our physics, a completer poetry
 Adjust our daily life and vulgar wants
 More fully than the special outside
 plans,
 Phalansteries, material institutes,
 The civil conscriptions and lay monas-
 teries
 Preferred by modern thinkers, as they
 thought
 The bread of man indeed made all his
 life,
 And washing seven times in the 'Peo-
 ple's Baths'
 Were sovereign for a people's leprosy,
 Still leaving out the essential prophet's
 word
 That comes in power. On which, we
 thunder down,
 We prophets, poets,—Virtue's in the
 word !
 The maker burnt the darkness up with
 His,
 To inaugurate the use of vocal life ;
 And, plant a poet's word even, deep
 enough
 In any man's breast, looking presently
 For offshoots, you have done more for
 the man

Than if you dressed him in a broad-
 cloth coat
 And warmed his Sunday potage at your
 fire.
 Yet Romney leaves me . . .
 God ! what face is that ?
 O Romney, O Marian !
 Walking on the quays
 And pulling thoughts to pieces leisurely,
 As if I caught at grasses in a field
 And bit them slow between my absent
 lips,
 And shred them with my hands . . .
 What face is that ?
 What a face, what a look, what a like-
 ness ! Full on mine
 The sudden blow of it came down, till
 all
 My blood swam, my eyes dazzled.
 Then I sprang—

It was as if a meditative man
 Were dreaming out a summer afternoon
 And watching gnats a-prick upon a
 pond,
 When something floats up suddenly, out
 there,
 Turns over . . . a dead face, known once
 alive—
 So old, so new ! It would be dreadful
 now
 To lose the sight and keep the doubt of
 this,
 He plunges—ha ! he has lost it in the
 splash.

I plunged—I tore the crowd up, either
 side,
 And rushed on,—forward, forward . . .
 after her.
 Her ? whom ?

A woman sauntered slow in front,
 Munching an apple,—she left off
 amazed
 As if I had snatched it : that's not she,
 . at least.
 A man walked arm-linked with a lady
 veiled,
 Both heads dropped closer than the
 need of talk :
 They started ; he forgot her with his
 face,
 And she, herself,—and clung to him as if

My look were fatal. Such a stream of
 folk,
 And all with cares and business of their
 own !
 I ran the whole quay down against their
 eyes ;
 No Marian ; nowhere Marian. Almost,
 now,
 I could call Marian, Marian, with the
 shriek
 Of desperate creatures calling for the
 Dead.
 Where is she, was she ? was she any-
 where ?
 I stood still, breathless, gazing, strain-
 ing out
 In every uncertain distance, till at last,
 A gentleman abstracted as myself
 Came full against me, then resolved the
 clash
 In voluble excuses,—obviously
 Some learned member of the Institute.
 Upon his way there, walking, for his
 health,
 While meditating on the last ‘ Dis-
 course ;’
 Pinching the empty air ’twixt finger
 and thumb,
 From which the snuff being ousted by
 that shock,
 Defiled his snow-white waistcoat duly
 pricked
 At the button-hole with honourable red ;
 ‘ Madame, your pardon,’—there he
 swerved from me
 A metre, as confounded as he had
 heard
 That Dumas would be chosen to fill up
 The next chair vacant, by his ‘ men *in*
us,’
 Since when was genius found respecta-
 ble ?
 It passes in its place, indeed,—which
 means
 The seventh floor back, or else the hos-
 pital :
 Revolving pistols are ingenious things,
 But prudent men (Academicans are)
 Scarce keep them in the cupboard next
 the prunes.

And so, abandoned to a bitter mirth,
 I loitered to my inn. O world, O
 world,

O jurists, rhymers, dreamers, what you
 please,
 We play a weary game of hide and
 seek !
 We shape a figure of our fantasy,
 Call nothing something, and run after
 it
 And lose it, lose ourselves too in the
 search,
 Till clash against us, comes a some-
 body
 Who also has lost something and is
 lost,
 Philosopher against Philanthropist,
 Academician against poet, man
 Against woman, against the living the
 dead,—
 Then home, with a bad headache and
 worst jest,

To change the water for my helio-
 tropes
 And yellow roses. Paris has such
 flowers.
 But England, also. ’Twas a yellow
 rose,
 By that south window of the little
 house,
 My cousin Romney gathered with his
 hand
 On all my birthdays for me, save the
 last ;
 And then I shook the tree too rough, too
 rough,
 For roses to stay after.

Now, my maps.
 I must not linger here from Italy
 Till the last nightingale is tired of song,
 And the last fire-fly dies off in the
 maize.
 My soul’s in haste to leap into the sun
 And scorch and seethe itself to a finer
 mood,
 Which here, in this chill north, is apt to
 stand
 Too stiffly in former moulds.

That face persists.
 It floats up, it turns over in my mind,
 As like to Marian, as one dead is like
 The same alive. In very deed a face
 And not a fancy, though it vanished so ;
 The small fair face between the darks
 of hair,

I used to liken, when I saw her first,
To a point of moonlit water down a well:
The low brow, the frank space between
the eyes,
Which always had the brown pathetic
look
Of a dumb creature who had been beaten
once
And never since was easy with the
world.
Ah, ah—now I remember perfectly
'Those eyes to-day,—how overlarge they
seemed,
As if some patient passionate despair
(Like a coal dropt and forgot on tapes-
try,
Which slowly burns a widening circle
out)
Had burnt them larger, larger. And
those eyes
To-day, I do remember, saw me too,
As I saw them, with conscious lids
astrain
In recognition. Now a fantasy,
A simple shade or image of the brain,
Is merely passive, does not retro-act,
Is seen, but sees not.

'Twas a real face,
Perhaps a real Marian.
Which being so,
I ought to write to Romney, 'Marian's
here.
Be comforted for Marian.'

My pen fell,
My hands struck sharp together as
hands do
Which hold at nothing. Can I write to
him
A half truth? can I keep my own soul
blind
To the other half, . . the worse? What
are our souls,
If still, to run on straight a sober pace
Nor start at every pebble or dead leaf,
They must wear blinkers, ignore facts,
suppress
Six tenths of the road? Confront the
truth, my soul!
And oh, as truly as that was Marian's
face,
The arms of that same Marian clasped
a thing

. . Not hid so well beneath the scanty
shawl,
I cannot name it now for what it was.

A child. Small business has a cast-
away
Like Marian with that crown of prosper-
ous wives,
At which the gentlest she grows arro-
gant
And says, 'my child.' Who'll find an
emerald ring
On a beggar's middle finger, and require
More testimony to convict a thief?
A child's too costly for so mere a wretch;
She filched it somewhere; and it means,
with her,
Instead of honor, blessing, . . merely
shame

I cannot write to Romney, 'Here she is,
Here's Marian found! I'll set you on
her track:

I saw her here, in Paris, . . and her
child.

She put away your love two years ago,
But, plainly, not to starve. You suf-
fered then;

And, now that you've forgot her utterly
As any last year's annual in whose place
You've planted a thick flowering ever-
green,

I choose, being kind, to write and tell
you this

To make you wholly easy—she's not
dead,

But only . . damned.'

Stop there: I go too fast,
I'm cruel like the rest,—in haste to take
The first stir in the arras for a rat,
And set my barking, biting thoughts
upon't.

—A child! what then? Suppose a
neighbour's sick

And asked her, 'Marian, carry out my
child

In this Spring air,'—I punish her for
that?

Or say, the child should hold her round
the neck

For good child-reasons, that he liked it
so

And would not leave her—she had win-
ning ways—

I brand her therefore that she took the child ?

Not so.

I will not write to Romney Leigh. For now he's happy,—and she may indeed

Be guilty,—and the knowledge of her fault

Would draggle his smooth time. But I, whose days

Are not so fine they cannot bear the rain,

And who moreover having seen her face

Must see it again, . . . *will* see it, by my hopes

Of one day seeing heaven too. The police

Shall track her, hound her, ferret their own soil ;

We'll dig this Paris to its catacombs

But certainly we'll find her, have her out,

And save her, if she will or will not—child

Or no child,—if a child, then one to save !

The long weeks passed on without consequence.

As easy find a footstep on the sand

The morning after spring-tide, as the trace

Of Marian's feet between the incessant surfs

Of this live flood. She may have moved this way,—

But so the star-fish does, and crosses out The dent of her small shoe. The foiled

police

Renounced me ; ' Could they find a girl and child,

No other signalment but a girl and child ?

No data shown but noticeable eyes And hair in masses, low upon the brow,

As if it were an iron crown and pressed ? Friends heighten, and suppose they

specify :

Why, girls with hair and eyes, are everywhere

In Paris ; they had turned me up in vain

No Marian Erle indeed, but certainly

Mathildes, Justines, Victoires, . . . or, if I sought

The English Betsis, Saras, by the score. They might as well go out into the

fields

To find a speckled bean, that's somehow specked,

And somewhere in the pod.'—They left me so.

Shall I leave Marian ? have I dreamed a dream ?

—I thank God I have found her ? I must say

'Thank God,' for finding her, although 'tis true

I find the world more sad and wicked for't.

But she—

I'll write about her, presently ; My hand's a-tremble as I had just

caught up

My heart to write with, in the place of it.

At least you'd take these letters to be writ

At sea, in storm !—wait now . . . A simple chance

Did all. I could not sleep last night, and tired

Of turning on my pillow and harder thoughts,

Went out at early morning, when the air

Is delicate with some last starry touch, To wander through the Market-place of

Flowers

(The prettiest haunt in Paris), and make sure

At worst that there were roses in the world

So wondering, musing with the artist's eye,

That keeps the shade-side of the thing it loves,

Half-absent, whole-observing, while the crowd

Of young vivacious and black-braided heads

Dipped, quick as finches in a blossomed tree,

Among the nosegays, cheapening this and that

In such a cheerful twitter of rapid speech,—

My heart leapt in me, startled by a voice
That slowly, faintly, with long breaths
that marked

The interval between the wish and
word,

Inquired in stranger's French, 'Would
that be much,

That branch of flowering mountain-
gorse?—' So much?

Too much for me, then! turning the
face round

So close upon me, that I felt the sigh
It turned with.

'Marian, Marian!'—face to face—
'Marian! I find you. Shall I let you
go?'

I held her two slight wrists with both
my hands;

'Ah Marian, Marian, can I let you go?'
—She fluttered from me like a cycla-
men,

As white, which taken in a sudden wind
Beats on against the palisade.—'Let
pass,'

She said at last. 'I will not,' I replied;
'I lost my sister Marian many days,
And sought her ever in my walks and
prayers,

And now I find her . . . do we throw
away

The bread we worked and prayed for,—
crumble it

And drop it, . . . to do even so by thee
Whom still I've hungered after more
than bread,

My sister Marian?—Can I hurt thee,
dear?

Then why distrust me? Never tremble
so.

Come with me rather where we'll talk
and live

And none shall vex us. I've a home for
you

And me and no one else' . . .

She shook her head.

'A home for you and me and no one
else

Ill-suits one of us: I prefer to such,
A roof of grass on which a flower might
spring,

Less costly to me than the cheapest
here;

And yet I could not, at this hour, afford
A like home even. That you offer yours,

I thank you. You are good as heaven
itself—

As good as one I knew before . . . Fare-
well!

I loosed her hands.—'In *his* name, no
farewell!

(She stood as if I held her,) 'for his
sake,

For his sake, Romney's! by the good he
meant,

Ay, always! by the love he pressed for
once,—

And by the grief, reproach, abandon-
ment,

He took in change' . . .

'He, Romney! who grieved *him*?
Who had the heart for't? what reproach
touched *him*?

Be merciful,—speak quickly.'

'Therefore come.'

I answered with authority,—'I think
We dare to speak such things and name
such names

In the open squares of Paris!'

Not a word

She said, but in a gentle humbled way,
(As one who had forgot herself in grief)
'Turned round and followed closely
where I went,

As if I led her by a narrow plank
Across devouring waters, step by step,—
And so in silence we walked on a mile.

And then she stopped: her face was
white as wax.

'We go much further?'

'You are ill,' I asked,

'Or tired?'

She looked the whiter for her smile.
'There's one at home,' she said, 'has
need of me

By this time,—and I must not let him
wait.'

'Not even,' I asked, 'to hear of Romney
Leigh?'

'Not even,' she said, 'to hear of Mister
Leigh.'

'In that case,' I resumed, 'I go with
you,

And we can talk the same thing there
as here.

None waits for me : I have my day to spend.'

Her lips moved in a spasm without a sound,—

But then she spoke. 'It shall be as you please ;

And better so—'tis shorter seen than told.

And though you will not find me worth your pains,

That even, may be worth some pains to know

For one as good as you are.'

Then she led

The way, and I, as by a narrow plank
Across devouring waters, followed her,
Stepping by her footsteps, breathing by
her breath,

And holding her with eyes that would
not slip ;

And so, without a word, we walked a
mile,

And so, another mile, without a word.

Until the peopled streets being all dismissed,

House-rows and groups all scattered
like a flock,

The market-gardens thickened, and the
long

White walls beyond, like spiders' out-
side threads,

Stretched, feeling blindly toward the
country-fields

Through half-built habitations and half-
dug

Foundations, — intervals of trenchant
chalk,

That bit betwixt the grassy uneven
turfs

Where goats (vine tendrils trailing from
their mouths)

Stood perched on edges of the cellarage
Which should be, staring as about to
leap

To find their coming Bacchus. All the
place

Seemed less a cultivation than a waste :
Men work here, only,—scarce begin to
live :

All's sad, the country struggling with
the town,

Like an untamed hawk upon a strong
man's fist,

That beats its wings and tries to get
away,

And cannot choose be satisfied so soon
To hop through court-yards with its
right foot tied,

The vintage plains and pastoral hills in
sight.

We stopped beside a house too high and
slim

To stand there by itself, but waiting till
Five others, two on this side, three on
that,

Should grow up from the sullen second
floor

They pause at now, to build it to a row.
The upper windows partly were un-
glazed

Meantime,—a meagre, unripe house : a
line

Of rigid poplars elbowed it behind,
And just in front, beyond the lime and
bricks

That wronged the grass between it and
the road,

A great acacia with its slender trunk
And overpoise of multitudinous leaves,

(In which a hundred fields might spill
their dew

And intense verdure, yet find room
enough)

Stood reconciling all the place with
green.

I followed up the stair upon her step.
She hurried upward, shot across a face,
A woman's on the landing,—'How now,
now !

Is no one to have holidays but you ?
You said an hour, and staid three hours,
I think,

And Julie waiting for your betters here ?
Why if he had waked, he might have
waked, for me.'

—Just murmuring an excusing word she
passed

And shut the rest out with the chamber-
door,

Myself shut in beside her.

'Twas a room
Scarce larger than a grave, and near as
bare ;

Two stools, a pallet-bed ; I saw the room :

A mouse could find no sort of shelter in't,

Much less a greater secret ; curtainless,—

The window fixed you with its torturing eye,

Defying you to take a step apart

If peradventure you would hide a thing.

I saw the whole room, I and Marian there

Alone.

Alone ? She threw her bonnet off, Then sighing as 'twere sighing the last time,

Approached the bed, and drew a shawl away :

You could not peel a fruit you fear to bruise

More calmly and more carefully than so,—

Nor would you find within, a rosier flushed

Pomegranate—

There he lay upon his back, The yearling creature, warm and moist with life

To the bottom of his dimples,—to the ends

Of the lovely tumbled curls about his face ;

For since he had been covered over-much

To keep him from the light glare, both his cheeks

Were hot and scarlet as the first live rose

The shepherd's heart-blood ebbed away into,

The faster for his love. And love was here

As instant : in the pretty baby-mouth, Shut close as if for dreaming that it sucked ;

The little naked feet drawn up the way Of nestled birdlings ; everything so soft

And tender,—to the tiny holdfast hands,

Which, closing on the finger into sleep, Had kept the mould of't.

While we stood there dumb,

For oh, that it should take such innocence

To prove just guilt, I thought, and stood there dumb ;

The light upon his eyelids pricked them wide,

And, staring out at us with all their blue,

As half perplexed between the angelhood

He had been away to visit in his sleep, And our most mortal presence,—gradually

He saw his mother's face, accepting it In change for heaven itself, with such a smile

As might have well been learnt there,—never moved,

But smiled on in a drowse of ecstasy, So happy (half with her and half with heaven)

He could not have the trouble to be stirred,

But smiled and lay there. Like a rose, I said :

As red and still indeed as any rose, That blows in all the silence of its leaves,

Content, in blowing, to fulfil its life.

She leaned above him (drinking him as wine)

In that extremity of love, 'twill pass For agony or rapture, seeing that love Includes the whole of nature, rounding it

To love . . no more,—since more can never be

Than just love. Self-forgot, cast out of self,

And drowning in the transport of the sight,

Her whole pale passionate face, mouth, forehead, eyes,

One gaze, she stood : then, slowly as he smiled,

She smiled too, slowly, smiling unaware, And drawing from his countenance to hers

A fainter red, as if she watched a flame And stood in it a-glow. 'How beautiful,'

Said she.

I answered, trying to be cold.
 (Must sin have compensations, was my thought,
 As if it were a holy thing like grief?
 And is a woman to be fooled aside
 From putting vice down, with that woman's toy
 A baby?)—‘Ay! the child is well enough,’
 I answered. ‘If his mother’s palms are clean
 They need be glad of course in clasping such :
 But if not,—I would rather lay my hand,
 Were I she,—on God’s brazen altar-bars
 Red-hot with burning sacrificial lambs,
 Than touch the sacred curls of such a child.’

She plunged her fingers in his clustering locks,
 As one who would not be afraid of fire ;
 And then with indrawn steady utterance said,
 ‘My lamb, my lamb ! although, through such as thou,
 The most unclean got courage and approach
 To God, once,—now they cannot, even with men,
 Find grace enough for pity and gentle words.’

‘My Marian,’ I made answer, grave and sad,
 ‘The priest who stole a lamb to offer him,
 Was still a thief. And if a woman steals
 (Through God’s own barrier-hedges of true love,
 Which fence out license in securing love)
 A child like this, that smiles so in her face,
 She is no mother but a kidnapper,
 And he’s a dismal orphan . . not a son ;
 Whom all her kisses cannot feed so full
 He will not miss hereafter a pure home
 To live in, a pure heart to lean against,
 A pure good mother’s name and memory
 To hope by, when the world grows thick and bad,
 And he feels out for virtue.’

‘Oh,’ she smiled
 With bitter patience, ‘the child takes his chance,
 Not much worse off in being fatherless
 Than I was, fathered. He will say, be-
 like,
 His mother was the saddest creature born ;
 He’ll say his mother lived so contrary
 To joy, that even the kindest, seeing her,
 Grew sometimes almost cruel : he’ll not say
 She flew contrarious in the face of God
 With bat-wings of her vices. Stole my child,—
 My flower of earth, my only flower on earth,
 My sweet, my beauty!’ . . Up she
 snatched the child,
 And, breaking on him in a storm of tears,
 Drew out her long sobs from their shivering roots,
 Until he took it for a game, and stretched
 His feet and flapped his eager arms like wings,
 And crowed and gurgled through his infant laugh :
 ‘Mine, mine,’ she said ; ‘I have as sure a right
 As any glad proud mother in the world,
 Who sets her darling down to cut his teeth
 Upon her church-ring. If she talks of law,
 I talk of law ! I claim my mother-dues
 By law,—the law which now is paramount ;
 The common law, by which the poor and weak
 Are trodden underfoot by vicious men,
 And loathed for ever after by the good.
 Let pass ! I did not filch . . I found the child.’

‘You found him, Marian?’
 ‘Ay, I found him where
 I found my curse,—in the gutter, with my shame !
 What have you, any of you, to say to that,
 Who all are happy, and sit safe and high

And never spoke before to arraign my
right
To grief itself? What, what, . . . being
beaten down
By hoofs of maddened oxen into a ditch,
Half-dead, whole mangled, . . . when a girl
at last,
Breathes, sees . . . and finds there, bed-
ded in her flesh,
Because of the extremity of the shock,
Some coin of price! . . . and when a
good man comes
(That's God! the best men are not quite
as good)
And says, 'I dropped the coin there :
take it you,
And keep it,—it shall pay you for the
loss,'—
You all put up your finger—'See the
thief!
'Observe that precious thing she has
come to filch :
'How bad those girls are!' Oh, my
flower, my pet,
I dare forget I have you in my arms,
And fly off to be angry with the world,
And fright you, hurt you with my tem-
pers, till
You double up your lip? Why, that
indeed
Is bad : a naughty mother !
'You mistake,'
I interrupted, 'If I loved you not,
I should not, Marian, certainly be here.
'Alas,' she said, 'you are so very good ;
And yet I wish indeed you had never
come
To make me sob until I vex the child.
It is not wholesome for these pleasure-
plats
To be so early watered by our brine.
And then, who knows? he may not like
me now
As well, perhaps, as ere he saw me fret,
One's ugly fretting! he has eyes the
same
As angels, but he cannot see as deep,
And so I've kept for ever in his sight
A sort of smile to please him, as you
place
A green thing from the garden in a cup,
To make believe it grows there Look,
my sweet,

My cowslip-ball! we've done with that
cross face,
And here's the face come back you
used to like.
Ah, ah! he laughs! he likes me. Ah,
Miss Leigh,
You're great and pure; but were you
purer still,—
As if you had walked, we'll say, no
otherwhere
Than up and down the new Jerusalem,
And held your trailing lutestring up
yourself
From brushing the twelve stones, for
fear of some
Small speck as little as a needle-prick,
White stitched on white,—the child
would keep to *me*
Would choose his poor lost Marian, like
me best,
And, though you stretched your arms,
cry back and cling,
As we do when God says it's time to die
And bids us go up higher. Leave us,
then ;
We two are happy. Does *he* push me off?
He's satisfied with me, as I with him.'

'So soft to one, so hard to others! Nay,'
I cried, more angry that she melted me,
'We make henceforth a cushion of our
faults
To sit and practise easy virtues on?
I thought a child was given to sanctify
A woman,—set her in the sight of all
The clear-eyed heavens, a chosen min-
ister
To do their business and lead spirits up
The difficult blue heights. A woman
lives,
Not bettered, quickened toward the
truth and good
Through being a mother? . . . then she's
none! although
She damps her baby's cheeks by kissing
them,
As we kill roses'
'Kill! O Christ,' she said,
And turned her wild sad face from side
to side
With most despairing wonder in it—
'What,
What have you in your souls against me
then,

All of you? am I wicked, do you think?
 God knows me, trusts me with a child:
 but you,
 You think me really wicked?"

'Complaisant'

I answered softly, 'to a wrong you've
 done,
 Because of certain profits,—which is
 wrong
 Beyond the first wrong, Marian. When
 you left
 The pure place and the noble heart, to
 take
 The hand of a seducer' . .

'Whom? whose hand?

I took the hand of' . .
 Springing up erect
 And lifting up the child at full arms'
 length,
 As if to bear him like an oriflamme
 Unconquerable to armies of reproach,—
 'By *him*,' she said, 'my child's head
 and its curls,
 By those blue eyes no woman born could
 dare

A perjury on, I make my mother's oath,
 That if I left that Heart, to lighten it,
 The blood of mine was still, except for
 grief!

No cleaner maid than I was, took a step
 To a sadder end,—no matron-mother
 now
 Looks backward to her early maiden-
 hood

Through chaster pulses. I speak stead-
 ily:

And if I lie so, . . if, being fouled in
 will

And paltered with in soul by devil's
 lust,

I dared to bid this angel take my part, . .
 Would God sit quiet, let us think, in
 heaven,

Nor strike me dumb with thunder? Yet
 I speak:

He clears me therefore. What, 'se-
 duced' 's your word?

Do wolves seduce a wandering fawn in
 France?

Do eagles, who have pinched a lamb
 with claws,

Seduce it into carrion? So with me.
 I was not ever, as you say, seduced,
 But simply, murdered.'

There she paused, and sighed,
 With such a sigh as drops from agony
 To exhaustion,—sighing while she let
 the babe

Slide down upon her bosom from her
 arms,

And all her face's light fell after him,
 Like a torch quenched in falling.

Down she sank,
 And he sate upon the bedside with the
 child.

But I, convicted, broken utterly,
 With woman's passion clung about her
 waist,

And kissed her hair and eyes,—'I have
 been wrong,

Sweet Marian' . . (weeping in a tender
 rage)

'Sweet holy Marian! And now, Ma-
 rian, now,

I'll use your oath although my lips are
 hard,

And by the child, my Marian, by the
 child,

I'll swear his mother shall be innocent
 Before my conscience, as in the open
 book

Of Him who reads our judgment. In-
 nocent,

My sister! let the night be ne'er so
 dark,

The moon is surely somewhere in the
 sky:

So surely is your whiteness to be found
 Through all dark facts. But pardon,

pardon me,
 And smile a little, Marian,—for the
 child,

If not for me, my sister.'

The poor lip
 Just motioned for the smile and let it
 go:

And then, with scarce a stirring of the
 mouth,

As if a statue spoke that could not
 breathe,

But spoke on calm between its marble
 lips,—

'I'm glad, I'm very glad you clear me
 so.

I should be sorry that you set me down
 With harlots, or with even a better
 name

Which misbecomes his mother. For
 the rest
 I am not on a level with your love,
 Nor ever was, you know,—but now am
 worse,
 Because that world of yours has dealt
 with me
 As when the hard sea bites and chews a
 stone
 And changes the first form of it. I've
 marked
 A shore of pebbles bitten to one shape
 From all the various life of madre-
 pores;
 And so, that little stone, called Marian
 Erle,
 Picked up and dropped by you another
 friend,
 Was ground and tortured by the inces-
 sant sea
 And bruised from what she was,—
 changed! death's a change,
 And she, I said, was murdered; Ma-
 rian's dead.
 What can you do with people when
 they are dead,
 But, if you are pious, sing a hymn and
 go,
 Or, if you are tender, heave a sigh and
 go,
 But go by all means,—and permit the
 grass
 To keep its green feud up 'twixt them
 and you?
 Then leave me,—let me rest. I'm
 dead, I say.
 And if, to save the child from death as
 well,
 The mother in me has survived the
 rest,
 Why, that's God's miracle you must not
 tax,
 I'm not less dead for that: I'm nothing
 more
 But just a mother. Only for the child,
 I'm warm, and cold, and hungry, and
 afraid,
 And smell the flowers a little, and see
 the sun,
 And speak still, and am silent,—just for
 him I
 I pray you therefore to mistake me not,
 And treat me haply as I were alive;
 For though you ran a pin into my soul,

I think it would not hurt or trouble me.
 Here's proof, dear lady,—in the mark-
 et-place
 But now, you promised me to say a
 word
 About . . a friend, who once, long years
 ago,
 Took God's place toward me, when He
 leans and loves
 And does not thunder, . . whom at last
 I left,
 As all of us leave God. You thought
 perhaps
 I seemed to care for hearing of that
 friend?
 Now, judge me! we have sate here half
 an hour
 And talked together of the child and
 me,
 And I not asked as much as, 'What's
 the thing
 You had to tell me of the friend . . the
 friend?'
 He's sad, I think you said,—he's sick
 perhaps?
 'Tis nought to Marian if he's sad or sick.
 Another would have crawled beside
 your foot
 And prayed your words out. Why, a
 beast, a dog,
 A starved cat, if he had fed it once with
 milk,
 Would show less hardness. But I'm
 dead, you see,
 And that explains it.'
 Poor, poor thing, she spoke
 And shook her head, as white and calm
 as frost
 Or days too cold for raining any more,
 But still with such a face, so much
 alive,
 I could not choose but take it on my
 arm
 And stroke the placid patience of its
 cheeks,—
 And told my story out, of Romney
 Leigh,
 How, having lost her, sought her, missed
 her still,
 He, broken-hearted for himself and her,
 Had drawn the curtains of the world
 awhile
 As if he had done with morning: There
 I stopped,

For when she gasped, and pressed me
with her eyes,

'And now . . . how is it with him? tell
me now,'

I felt the shame of compensated grief,
And chose my words with scruple—
slowly stepped

Upon the slippery stones set here and
there

Across the sliding water. 'Certainly
As evening empties morning into night,
Another morning takes the evening up
With healthful, providential inter-
change ;

And though he thought still of her,'—

'Yes, she knew
She understood : she had supposed, in-
deed,

That, as one stops a hole upon a flute,
At which a new note comes and shapes
the tune,

Excluding her would bring a worthier
in,

And, long ere this, that Lady Waldemar
He loved so' . . .

'Loved,' I started,—'loved her so !
Now tell me' . . .

'I will tell you,' she replied :
'But since we're taking oaths, you'll
promise first

That he in England, he, shall never
learn

In what a dreadful trap his creature
here,

Round whose unworthy neck he had
meant to tie

The honourable ribbon of his name,

Fell unaware and came to butchery ;

Because,—I know him,—as he takes to
heart

The grief of every stranger, he's not
like

'To banish mine as far as I could choose
In wishing him most happy. Now he
leaves

To think of me, perverse, who went my
way,

Unkind, and left him,—but if once he
knew . . .

Ah, then, the sharp nail of my cruel
wron

Would fasten me forever in his sight,
Like some poor curious bird, through
each spread wing

Nailed high up over a fierce hunter's
fire,

To spoil the dinner of all tenderer folk
Come in by chance. Nay, since your

Marian's dead,
You shall not hang her up, but dig a
hole

And bury her in silence ! ring no bells.'

I answered gaily, though my whole
voice wept ;

'We'll ring the joy-bells, not the fune-
ral-bells,

Because we have her back, dead or
alive.'

She never answered that, but shook her
head ;

Then low and calm, as one who, safe in
heaven,

Shall tell a story of his lower life,
Unmoved by shame or anger,—so she
spoke.

She told me she had loved upon her
knees,

As others pray, more perfectly absorbed
In the act and inspiration. She felt his

For just his uses, not her own at all,
His stool, to sit on or put up his foot,

His cup, to fill with wine or vinegar,
Whichever drink might please him at

the chance,
For that should please her always : let

him write
His name upon her . . . it seemed natural ;

It was most precious, standing on his
shelf,

To wait until he chose to lift his hand.
Well, well,—I saw her then, and must

have seen
How bright her life went floating on her

love,
Like wicks the housewives send afloat

on oil
Which feeds them to a flame that lasts

the night.

To do good seemed so much his busi-
ness,

That, having done it, she was fain to
think,

Must fill up his capacity for joy.
At first she never mooted with herself

If *he* was happy, since he made her so,

Or if *he* loved her, being so much beloved :

Who thinks of asking if the sun is light,
Observing that it lightens ? who's so bold,

To question God of His felicity ?

Still less. And thus she took for granted first,

What first of all she should have put to proof,

And sinned against him so, but only so.
'What could you hope,' she said, 'of such as she ?

You take a kid you like, and turn it out
In some fair garden ; though the creature's fond

And gentle, it will leap upon the beds
And break your tulips, bite your tender trees :

The wonder would be if such innocence
Spoiled less. A garden is no place for kids.'

And, by degrees, when he who had chosen her,

Brought in his courteous and benignant friends

To spend their goodness on her, which she took

So very gladly, as a part of his,—
By slow degrees it broke on her slow sense,

That she too in that Eden of delight
Was out of place, as like the silly kid,
Still did most mischief where she meant most love.

A thought enough to make a woman mad,

(No beast in this but she may well go mad)

That saying 'I am thine to love and use'
May blow the plague in her protesting breath

To the very man for whom she claims to die,—

That, clinging round his neck, she pulls him down

And drowns him,—and that, lavishing her soul,

She hales perdition on him. 'So, being mad,'

Said Marian . .

'Ah—who stirred such thoughts, you ask ?

Whose fault it was, that she should have such thoughts ?

None's fault, none's fault. The light comes, and we see :

But if it were not truly for our eyes,
There would be nothing seen, for all the light ;

And so with Marian. If she saw at last,
The sense was in her,—Lady Waldemar
Had spoken all in vain else.'

'O my heart,
O prophet in my heart,' I cried aloud,
'Then Lady Waldemar spoke !'

'Did she speak,'
Mused Marian softly—'or did she only sign ?

Or did she put a word into her face
And look, and so impress you with the word ?

Or leave it in the foldings of her gown,
Like rosemary smells, a movement will shake out

When no one's conscious ? who shall say or guess ?

One thing alone was certain,—from the day

The gracious lady paid a visit first,
She, Marian, saw things different,—felt distrust

Of all that sheltering roof of circumstance

Her hopes were building into with clay nests :

Her heart was restless, pacing up and down

And fluttering, like dumb creatures before the storms,

Not knowing wherefore she was ill at ease.'

'And still the lady came,' said Marian Erle,

'Much oftener than *he* knew it, Mister Leigh.

She bade me never tell him she had come,

She liked to love me better than he knew,

So very kind was Lady Waldemar :

And every time she brought with her more light,

And every light made sorrow clearer . .
Well,

Ah, well ! we cannot give her blame for that ;

- 'Twould be the same thing if an angel
came,
Whose right should prove our wrong.
And every time
The lady came, she looked more beau-
tiful,
And spoke more like a flute among green
trees,
Until at last, as one, whose heart being
sad
On hearing lovely music, suddenly
Dissolves in weeping, I brake out in
tears
Before her . . . asked her counsel . . . 'had
I erred
'In being too happy? would she set me
straight?
'For she, being wise and good and born
above
'The flats I had never climbed from,
could perceive
'If such as I might grow upon the hills;
'And whether such poor herb sufficed to
grow
'For Romney Leigh to break his fast
upon't,—
'Or would he pine on such, or haply
starve?
She wrapt me in her generous arms at
once,
And let me dream a moment how it
feels
To have a real mother, like some girls:
But when I looked, her face was young-
er . . . ay,
Youth's too bright not to be a little
hard,
And beauty keeps itself still uppermost,
That's true!—though Lady Waldemar
was kind,
She hurt me, hurt as if the morning-sun
Should smite us on the eyelids when we
sleep,
And wake us up with headache. Ay,
and soon
Was light enough to make my heart
ache too:
She told me truths I asked for . . . 'twas
my fault . . .
'That Romney could not love me if he
would,
'As men call loving; there are bloods
that flow
'Together like some rivers and not mix,
- 'Through contraries of nature. He in-
deed
'Was set to wed me, to espouse my class,
'Act out a rash opinion,—and, once
wed,
'So just a man and gentle could not
choose
'But make my life as smooth as mar-
riage-ring,
'Bespeak me mildly, keep me a cheer-
ful house,
'With servants, brooches, all the flowers
I liked,
And pretty dresses, silk the whole year
round' . . .
At which I stopped her,—'This for me.
And now
'For *him*.'—She hesitated,—truth grew
hard;
She owned, "'Twas plain a man like
Romney Leigh
'Required a wife more level to himself.
'If day by day he had to bend his
height
'To pick up sympathies, opinions,
thoughts,
'And interchange the common talk of
life
'Which helps a man to live as well as
talk,
'His days were heavily taxed. Who
buys a staff
'To fit the hand, that reaches but the
knee?
'He'd feel it bitter to be forced to miss
'The perfect joy of married suited pairs,
'Who bursting through the separating
hedge
'Of personal dues with that sweet eglan-
tine
'Of equal love, keep saying, 'So *we*
think,
'"It strikes *us*,—that's *our* fancy.'"—
When I asked
If earnest will, devoted love, employed
In youth like mine, would fail to raise
me up,
As two strong arms will always raise a
child
To a fruit hung overhead? she sighed
and sighed . . .
'That could not be,' she feared. 'You
take a pink,
'You dig about the roots and water it,

'And so improve it to a garden-pink,
'But will not change it to a heliotrope,
'The kind remains. And then, the
harder truth—

'This Romney Leigh, so rash to leap a
pale,

'So bold for conscience, quick for mar-
tyrdom,

'Would suffer steadily and never flinch,
'But suffer surely and keenly, when his
class

'Turned shoulder on him for a shameful
match,

'And set him up as nine-pin in their
talk,

'To bowl him down with jestings.'—
There, she paused ;

And when I used the pause in doubting
that

We wronged him after all in what we
feared—

'Suppose such things should never
touch him more

'In his high conscience (if the thing
should be,)

'Than, when the queen sits in an upper
room,

'The horses in the street can spatter
her !'—

A moment, hope came,—but the lady
closed

The door and nicked the lock and shut
it out,

Observing wisely that, 'the tender
heart

'Which made him over-soft to a lower
class,

'Would scarcely fail to make him sensi-
tive

'To a higher,—how they thought and
what they felt.

'Alas, 'alas,' said Marian, rocking slow
'The pretty baby who was near asleep,
'The eyelids creeping over the blue
balls,—

She made it clear, too clear—I saw the
whole !

And yet who knows if I had seen my
way

Straight out of it by looking, though
'twas clear,

Unless the generous lady, 'ware of this,
Had set her own house all a-fire for me,

To light me forwards ? Leaning on my
face

Her heavy agate eyes which crushed
my will,

She told me tenderly, (as when men
come

To a bedside to tell people they must
die)

'She knew of knowledge,—ay, of
knowledge knew,

'That Romney Leigh had loved *her* for-
merly :

'And *she* loved *him*, she might say,
now the chance

'Was past . . but that, of course, he
never guessed,—

'For something came between them . .
something thin

'As a cobweb . . catching every fly of
doubt

'To hold it buzzing at the window-pane
'And help to dim the daylight. Ah

man's pride

'Or woman's—which is greatest ? most
averse

'To brushing cobwebs ? Well, but she
and he

'Remained fast friends ; it seemed not
more than so,

'Because he had bound his hands and
could not stir :

'An honourable man, if somewhat
rash ;

'And she, not even for Romney, would
she spill

'A blot . . as little even as a tear . .

'Upon his marriage-contract—not to
gain

'A better joy for two than came by
that :

'For, though I stood between her heart
and heaven,

'She loved me wholly."

Did I laugh or curse ?
I think I sate there silent, hearing all,

Ay, hearing double,—Marian's tale, at
once,

And Romney's marriage-vow, '*I'll keep
to THEE,*'

Which means that woman-serpent. Is
it time

For church now ?
'Lady Waldemar spoke more,'
Continued Marian, 'but as when a soul

Will pass out through the sweetness of
a song

Beyond it, voyaging the uphill road,—
Even so mine wandered from the things
I heard

To those I suffered. It was afterward
I shaped the resolution to the act.

For many hours we talked. What
need to talk?

The fate was clear and close; it
touched my eyes;

But still the generous lady tried to keep
The case afloat, and would not let it go,
And argued, struggled upon Marian's
side,

Which was not Romney's! though she
little knew

What ugly monster would take up the
end,—

What griping death within the drown-
ing death

Was ready to complete my sum of
death.

I thought,—Perhaps he's sliding now
the ring

Upon that woman's finger. .

She went on:

The lady, failing to prevail her way,
Upgathered my torn wishes from the
ground

And pieced them with her strong bene-
volence;

And, as I thought I could breathe freer
air

Away from England, going without
pause,

Without farewell,—just breaking with
a jerk

The blossomed offshoot from my thorny
life,—

She promised kindly to provide the
means,

With instant passage to the colonies
And full protection,' would commit me
straight

* To one who once had been her wait-
ing-maid

* And had the customs of the world, in-
tent

* On changing England for Australia
'Herself to carry out her fortune so.'

For which I thanked the Lady Walde-
mar,

As men upon their death-beds thank
last friends

Who lay the pillow straight: it is not
much,

And yet 'tis all of which they are capa-
ble,

This lying smoothly in a bed to die.

And so, 'twas fixed;—and so, from day
to day,

The woman named came in to visit
me.'

Just then, the girl stopped speaking,—
sate erect,

And stared at me as if I had been a
ghost,

(Perhaps I looked as white as any
ghost)

With large-eyed horror. 'Does God
make,' she said,

'All sorts of creatures really, do you
think?

Or is it that the Devil slavers them

So excellently, that we come to doubt

Who's stronger, He who makes, or he
who mars?

I never liked the woman's face or voice
Or ways: it made me blush to look at
her;

It made me tremble if she touched my
hand;

And when she spoke a fondling word
I shrank

As if one hated me who had power to
hurt;

And every time she came, my veins ran
cold

As somebody were walking on my
grave.

At last I spoke to Lady Waldemar:

'Could such an one be good to trust?'
I asked.

Whereat the lady stroked my cheek and
laughed

Her silver-laugh—(one must be born to
laugh,

To put such music in it) 'Foolish girl,
'Your scattered wits are gathering wool
beyond

'The sheep-walk reaches!—leave the
thing to me'

And therefore, half in trust, and half in
scorn

That I had heart still for another fear

In such a safe despair, I left the thing.
 'The rest is short. I was obedient :
 I wrote my letter which delivered *him*
 From Marian to his own prosperities,
 And followed that bad guide. The
 lady?—hush,
 I never blame the lady. Ladies who
 Sit high, however willing to look down,
 Will scarce see lower than their dainty
 feet :
 And Lady Waldemar saw less than I,
 With what a Devil's daughter I went
 forth
 Along the swine's road, down the preci-
 pice,
 In such a curl of hell-foam caught and
 choked,
 No shriek of soul in anguish could pierce
 through
 To fetch some help. They say there's
 help in heaven
 For all such cries. But if one cries from
 hell . . .
 What then?—the heavens are deaf upon
 that side.
 'A woman . . . hear me,—let me make it
 plain,—
 A woman . . . not a monster . . . both her
 breasts
 Made right to suckle babes . . . she took
 me off
 A woman also, young and ignorant
 And heavy with my grief, my two poor
 eyes
 Near washed away with weeping, till
 the trees,
 The blessed unaccustomed trees and
 fields
 Ran either side the train like stranger
 dogs
 Unworthy of any notice,—took me off,
 So dull, so blind, so only half alive,
 Not seeing by what road, nor by what
 ship,
 Nor toward what place, nor to what end
 of all.
 Men carry a corpse thus,—past the door-
 way, past
 The garden-gate, the children's play-
 ground, up
 The green lane,—then they leave it in
 the pit,
 To sleep and find corruption, cheek to
 cheek

With him who stinks since Friday.
 'But suppose ;
 To go down with one's soul into the
 grave,
 To go down half dead, half alive, I say,
 And wake up with corruption, . . . cheek
 to cheek
 With him who stinks since Friday !
 There it is,
 And that's the horror of't, Miss Leigh.
 'You feel ?
 You understand?—no, do not look at
 me,
 But understand. The blank, blind,
 weary way
 Which led . . . where'er it led . . . away at
 least ;
 The shifted ship . . . to Sydney or to
 France,
 Still bound, wherever else, to another
 land ;
 The swooning sickness on the dismal
 sea,
 The foreign shore, the shameful house,
 the night,
 The feeble blood, the heavy-headed
 grief, . . .
 No need to bring their damnable drug-
 ged cup,
 And yet they brought it. Hell's so
 prodigal
 Of devil's gifts . . . hunts liberally in
 packs,
 Will kill no poor small creature of the
 wilds
 But fifty red wide throats must smoke
 at it,
 As *his* at me . . . when waking up at
 last . . .
 I told you that I waked up in the grave.
 'Enough so!—it is plain enough so.
 True,
 We wretches cannot tell out all our
 wrong
 Without offence to decent happy folk.
 I know that we must scrupulously hint
 With half-words, delicate reserves, the
 thing
 Which no one scrupled we should feel
 in full.
 Let pass the rest, then ; only leave my
 oath
 Upon this sleeping child—man's violence

Not man's seduction, made me what I
 am,
 As lost as . . I told *him* I should be lost:
 When mothers fail us, can we help our-
 selves?
 That's fatal!—And you call it being
 lost,
 That down came next day's noon and
 caught me there
 Half gibbering and half raving on the
 floor,
 And wondering what had happened up
 in heaven,
 That suns should dare to shine when
 God himself
 Was certainly abolished.

‘I was mad,
 How many weeks, I know not,—many
 weeks.
 I think they let me go, when I was mad,
 They feared my eyes and loosed me, as
 boys might
 A mad dog which they had tortured.
 Up and down
 I went by road and village, over tracts
 Of open foreign country, large and
 strange,
 Crossed everywhere by long thin pop-
 lar-lines
 Like fingers of some ghastly skeleton
 Hand
 Through sunlight and through moon-
 light evermore
 Pushed out from hell itself to pluck me
 back,
 And resolute to get me, slow and sure;
 While every roadside Christ upon his
 cross
 Hung reddening through his gory
 wounds at me,
 And shook his nails in anger and came
 down
 To follow a mile after, wading up
 The low vines and green wheat, crying
 ‘Take the girl!
 ‘She's none of mine from henceforth.’
 Then I knew
 (But this is somewhat dimmer than the
 rest)
 The charitable peasants gave me bread
 And leave to sleep in straw: and twice
 they tied,
 At parting, Mary's image round my
 neck—

How heavy it seemed! as heavy as a
 stone;
 A woman has been strangled with less
 weight:
 I threw it in a ditch to keep it clean
 And ease my breath a little, when none
 looked;
 I did not need such safeguards:—brutal
 men
 Stopped short, Miss Leigh, in insult,
 when they had seen
 My face,—I must have had an awful
 look.
 And so I lived: the weeks passed on,
 —I lived.
 'Twas living my old tramp-life o'er
 again,
 But, this time, in a dream, and hunted
 round
 By some prodigious Dream-fear at my
 back,
 Which ended yet: my brain cleared
 presently
 And there I sate, one evening, by the
 road,
 I, Marian Erle, myself, alone, undone,
 Facing a sunset low upon the flats
 As if it were the finish of all time,
 The great red stone upon my sepulchre,
 Which angels were too weak to roll
 away.

SEVENTH BOOK.

THE woman's motive? shall we daub
 ourselves
 With finding roots for nettles? 'tis soft
 clay
 And easily explored. She had the
 means,
 The monies, by the lady's liberal grace,
 In trust for that Australian scheme
 and me,
 Which so, that she might clutch with
 both her hands
 And chink to her naughty uses undis-
 turbed,
 She served me (after all it was not
 strange;
 'Twas only what my mother would
 have done)

A motherly, right damnable good turn.

' Well, after. There are nettles every-
where,
But smooth green grasses are more com-
mon still ;

The blue of heaven is larger than the
cloud ;

A miller's wife at Clichy took me in
And spent her pity on me,—made me
calm

And merely very reasonably sad.
She found me a servant's place in Paris,
where

I tried to take a cast-off life again,
And stood as quiet as a beaten ass
Who, having fallen through overloads,
stands up
To let them charge him with another
pack.

A few months, so. My mistress, young
and light,
Was easy with me, less for kindness
than

Because she led, herself, an easy time
Betwixt her lover and her looking-
glass,

Scarce knowing which way she was
praised the most.

She felt so pretty and so pleased all day
She could not take the trouble to be
cross,

But sometimes, as I stooped to tie her
shoe,

Would tap me softly with her slender
foot

Still restless with the last night's danc-
ing in't,

And say, ' Fie, pale-face ! are you En-
glish girls

' All grave and silent ? mass-book still,
and Lent ?

' And first-communion pallor on your
cheeks,

' Worn past the time for't ? little fool,
be gay ! '

At which she vanished, like a fairy,
through

A gap of silver laughter.

' Came an hour

When all went otherwise. She did not
speak,

But clenched her brows, and clipped me
with her eyes

As if a viper, with a pair of tongs.
Too far for any touch, yet near enough
To view the writhing creature,—then at
last,

' Stand still there, in the holy Virgin's
name,

' Thou Marian ; thou'rt no reputable
girl,

' Although sufficient dill for twenty
saints !

' I think thou mock'st me and my
house,'

' Confess thou'lt be a mother in a month,
' Thou mask of saintship.'

' Could I answer her ?

The light broke in so : it meant *that*
then, *that* ?

I had not thought of that, in all my
thoughts,

Through all the cold, numb aching of
my brow,

Through all the heaving of impatient
life

Which threw me on death at intervals,
through all

The upbreak of the fountains of my
heart

The rains had swelled too large : it
could mean *that* ?

Did God make mothers out of victims,
then,

And set such pure amens to hideous
deeds ?

Why not ? He overblows an ugly grave
With violets which blossom in the
spring.

And *I* could be a mother in a month !
I hope it was not wicked to be glad.

I lifted up my voice and wept, and
laughed,

To heaven, not her, until it tore my
throat.

' Confess, confess ! ' what was there to
confess,

Except man's cruelty, except my wrong ?
Except this anguish, or this ecstasy ?

This shame or glory ? The light woman
there

Was small to take it in : an acorn-cup
Would take the sea in sooner.

" Good," she cried ;

'Unmarried and a mother, and she laughs!

'These unchaste girls are always impudent.

'Get out, intriguer? leave my house and trot:

'I wonder you should look me in the face,

'With such a filthy secret.'

'Then I rolled

My scanty bundle up and went my way,
Washed white with weeping, shuddering
head and foot

With blind hysteric passion, staggering
forth

Beyond those doors. 'Twas natural of
course

She should not ask me where I meant to
sleep:

I might sleep well beneath the heavy
Seine,

Like others of my sort; the bed was laid
For us. But any woman, womanly,
Had thought of him who should be in a
month,

The sinless babe that should be in a
month,

And if by chance he might be warmer
housed

Than underneath such dreary, dripping
caves.'

I broke on Marian there. 'Yet she
herself,

A wife, I think, had scandals of her own,
A lover not her husband'

'Ay,' she said,

'But gold and meal are measured other-
wise;

I learnt so much at school,' said Marian
Erle.

'O crooked world,' I cried, 'ridiculous
If not so lamentable! It's the way
With these light women of a thrifty
vice,

My Marian,—always hard upon the rent
In any sister's virtue! while they keep
Their own so darned and patched with
perfidy,

That, though a rag itself, it looks as well
Across a street, in balcony or coach,
As any perfect stuff might. For my
part,

I'd rather take the wind-side of the
stews

Than touch such women with my finger-
end!

They top the poor street-walker by their
lie,

And look the better for being so much
worse:

The devil's most devilish when respecta-
ble.

But you, dear, and your story.'

'All the rest

Is here,' she said, and signed upon the
child.

'I found a mistress-sempstress who was
kind

And let me sew in peace among her
girls;

And what was better than to draw the
threads

All day and half the night for him and
him?

And so I lived for him, and so he lives,
And so I know, by this time, God lives
too.'

She smiled beyond the sun and ended
so,

And all my soul rose up to take her
part

Against the world's successes, virtues,
fames.

'Come with me, sweetest sister,' I re-
turned,

'And sit within my house, and do me
good

From henceforth, thou and thine I ye
are my own

From henceforth. I am lonely in the
world,

And thou art lonely, and the child is
half

An orphan. Come,—and henceforth
thou and I

Being still together will not miss a friend,
Nor be a father, since two mothers shall

Make that up to him. I am journeying
south,

And in my Tuscan home I'll find a niche
And set thee there, my saint, the child

and thee,

And burn the lights of love before thy
face,

And ever at thy sweet look cross my-
self

From mixing with the world's prosperities ;
That so, in gravity and holy calm,
We two may live on toward the truer life.'

She looked me in the face and answered not,
Nor signed she was unworthy, nor gave thanks,
But took the sleeping child and held it out

To meet my kiss, as if requiting me
And trusting me at once. And thus at once,

I carried him and her to where I lived ;
She's there now, in the little room, asleep,

I hear the soft child-breathing through the door ;

And all three of us, at to-morrow's break,

Pass onward, homeward, to our Italy.
Oh, Romney Leigh, I have your debts to pay,

And I'll be just and pay them.

But yourself !

To pay your debts is scarcely difficult ;
To buy your life is nearly impossible,
Being sold away to Lamia. My head aches ;

I cannot see my road along this dark ;
Nor can I creep and grope, as fits the dark,

For these foot-catching robes of womanhood :

A man might walk a little . . but I !—
He loves

The Lamia-woman,—and I, write to him

What stops his marriage, and destroys his peace,—

Or what perhaps shall simply trouble him,

Until she only need to touch his sleeve
With just a finger's tremulous white flame,

Saying, 'Ah,—Aurora Leigh ! a pretty tale,

'A very pretty poet ! I can guess

'The motive,'—then, to catch his eyes in hers,

And vow she does not wonder,—and they two

To break in laughter as the sea along
A melancholy coast, and float up higher,
In such a laugh, their fatal weeds of love !

Ay, fatal, ay. And who shall answer me

Fate has not hurried tides ; and if to-night

My letter would not be a night too late,
An arrow shot into a man that's dead,
To prove a vain intention ; Would I show

The new wife vile, to make the husband mad ?

No, Lamia ! shut the shutters, bar the doors

From every glimmer on thy serpent-skin !

I will not let thy hideous secret out
To agonise the man I love—I mean
The friend I love . . as friends love.

It is strange,

To-day while Marion told her story like
To absorb most listeners, how I listened chief

To a voice not hers, nor yet that enemy's,

Nor God's in wrath, . . but one that mixed with mine

Long years ago, among the garden-trees,

And said to *me*, to *me*, too, 'Be my wife,

Aurora.' It is strange with what a swell

Yearning passion, as a snow of ghosts
Might beat against the impervious doors

of heaven,
I thought, 'Now, if I had been a woman, such

As God made women, to save men by love,—

By just my love I might have saved this man,

And made a nobler poem for the world
'Than all I have failed in.' But I failed

besides
In this ; and now he's lost ! through me alone !

And, by my only fault, his empty house
Sucks in, at this same hour, a wind from hell

To keep his hearth cold, make his casements creak

Forever to the tune of plague and sin—
O Romney, O my Romney, O my
friend!

My cousin and friend! my helper, when
I would,

! My love, that might be! mine!

Why, how one weeps
When one's too weary! Were a wit-
ness by,

He'd say some folly . . . that I loved the
man,

Who knows? . . . and make me laugh
again for scorn.

At strongest, women are as weak in
flesh,

As men, at weakest, vilest, are in soul:

So, hard for women to keep pace with
men!

As well give up at once, sit down at
once,

And weep as I do. Tears, tears! *why*
we weep?

'Tis worth inquiry?—That we've shamed
a life,

Or lost a love, or missed a world, per-
haps?

By no means. Simply, that we've
walked too far,

Or talked too much, or felt the wind i'
the east,—

And so we weep, as if both body and
soul

Broke up in water—this way.

Poor mixed rags
Forsooth we're made of, like those
other dolls

That lean with pretty faces into fairs.

It seems as if I had a man in me,

Despising such a woman.

Yet indeed,
To see a wrong or suffering moves us all
To undo it, though we should undo our-
selves;

Ay, all the more, that we undo our-
selves;

That's womanly, past doubt, and not ill-
moved.

A natural movement therefore, on my
part,

To fill the chair up of my cousin's wife,
And save him from a devil's company!

We're all so,—made so,—'tis our wo-
man's trade

To suffer torment for another's ease.

The world's male chivalry has perished
out,

But women are knight-errant to the
last;

And if Cervantes had been Shakes-
peare too,

He had made his Don a Donna.

So it clears,
And so we rain our skies blue.

Put away
This weakness. If, as I have just now
said,

A man's within me,—let him act him-
self,

Ignoring the poor conscious trouble of
blood

That's called the woman merely. I will
write

Plain words to England.—if too late, too
late,

If ill-accounted, then accounted ill;

We'll trust the heavens with something.

'Dear Lord Howe
You'll find a story on another leaf
Of Marion Erle,—what noble friend of
yours

She trusted once, through what flagi-
tious means

To what disastrous ends;—the story's
true.

I found her wandering on the Paris
quays,

A babe upon her breast,—unnatural

Unseasonable outcast on such snow

Unthawed to this time. I will tax in this
Your friendship, friend,—if that con-
victed She

Be not his wife yet, to denounce the
facts

To himself,—but, otherwise, to let them
pass

On tip-toe like escaping murderers,

And tell my cousin merely—Marian
lives,

Is found, and finds her home with such
a friend,

Myself, Aurora. Which good news,
'She's found,'

Will help to make him merry in his love:
I send it, tell him, for my marriage gift,

As good as orange water for the nerves,
Or perfumed gloves for headaches,—

though aware

That he, except of love, is scarcely sick:
I mean the new love this time, . . . since
last year.

Such quick forgetting on the part of
men!

Is any shrewder trick upon the cards
To enrich them? pray instruct me how
'tis done.

First, clubs,—and while you look at
clubs, 'tis spades;

That's prodigy. The lightning strikes a
man,

And when we think to find him dead
and charred . . .

Why, there he is on a sudden, playing
pipes

Beneath the splintered elm-tree! Crime
and shame

And all their hoggerly trample your
smooth world,

Nor leave more foot-marks than Apollo's
kine,

Whose hoofs were muffled by the thiev-
ing god

In tamarisk-leaves and myrtle. I'm so
sad,

So weary and sad to-night, I'm some-
what sour,—

Forgive me. To be blue and shrew at
once,

Exceeds all toleration except yours;
But yours, I know, is infinite. Fare-
well.

To-morrow we take train for Italy.
Speak gently of me to your gracious
wife,

As one, however far, shall yet be near
In loving wishes to your house.'

I sign.

And now I loose my heart upon a page,
This—

'Lady Waldemar, I'm very glad
I never liked you; which you knew so
well

You spared me, in your turn, to like me
much.

Your liking surely had done worse for
me

'Than has your loathing, though the last
appears

Sufficiently unscrupulous to hurt,
And not afraid of judgment. Now,
there's space

Between our faces,—I stand off, as if

I judged a stranger's portrait and pro-
nounced

Indifferently the type was good or bad:
What matter to me that the lines are
false,

I ask you? Did I ever ink my lips
By drawing your name through them as
a friend's,

Or touch your hands as lovers do?
thank God

I never did: and, since you're proved
so vile,

Ay, vile, I say,—we'll show it presently,
I'm not obliged to nurse my friend in
you,

Or wash out my own blots, in counting
yours,

Or even excuse myself to honest souls
Who seek to touch my lip or clasp my
palm,—

'Alas, but Lady Waldemar came first!'
'Tis true, by this time you may near me
so

That you're my cousin's wife. You've
gambled deep

As Lucifer, and won the morning-star
In that case,—and the noble house of
Leigh

Must henceforth with its good roof shel-
ter you:

I cannot speak and burn you up between
Those rafters, I who am born a Leigh,—
nor speak

And pierce your breast through Rom-
ney's, I who live

His friend and cousin!—so, you're safe.
You two

Must grow together like the tares and
wheat

Till God's great fire.—But make the
best of time

'And hide this letter! let it speak no
more

Than I shall, how you tricked poor
Marian Erle,

And set her own love digging her own
grave

Within her green hope's pretty garden-
ground;

Ay, sent her forth with some one of
your sort

To a wicked house in France,—from
which she fled

With curses in her eyes and ears and throat,
 Her whole soul choked with curses,—
 mad in short,
 And madly scouring up and down for weeks
 The foreign hedgeless country, lone and lost,—
 So innocent, male-fiends might slink within
 Remote hell-corners, seeing her so defiled.

‘But you,—you are a woman and more bold.
 To do you justice, you’d not shrink to face . .
 We’ll say the unfledged life in the other room,
 Which, treading down God’s corn, you trod in sight
 Of all the dogs, in reach of all the guns,—
 Ay, Marian’s babe, her poor unfathered child,
 Her yearling babe!—you’d face him when he wakes
 And opens up his wonderful blue eyes :
 You’d meet them and not wink perhaps, nor fear
 God’s triumph in them and supreme revenge,
 When righting His creation’s balance-scale
 (You pulled as low as Tophet) to the top
 Of most celestial innocence. For me
 Who am not as bold, I own those infant eyes
 Have set me praying.

‘While they look at heaven,
 No need of protestation in my words
 Against the place you’ve made them !
 let them look !
 They’ll do your business with the heavens, be sure :
 I spare you common curses.

‘Ponder this.
 If haply you’re the wife of Romney Leigh,
 (For which inheritance beyond your birth
 You sold that poisonous porridge called your soul)

I charge you be his faithful and true wife !

Keep warm his hearth and clean his board, and, when
 He speaks, be quick with your obedience ;
 Still grind your paltry wants and low desires
 To dust beneath his heel ; though even thus,
 The ground must hurt him,—it was writ of old,

‘Ye shall not yoke together ox and ass,’
 The nobler and ignobler. Ay, but you
 Shall do your part as well as such ill things
 Can do aught good. You shall not vex him,—mark,
 You shall not vex him . . jar him when he’s sad,
 Or cross him when he’s eager. Understand
 To trick him with apparent sympathies,
 Nor let him see thee in the face too near
 And unlearn thy sweet seeming. Pay the price
 Of lies, by being constrained to lie on still :

‘Tis easy for thy sort : a million more
 Will scarcely damn thee deeper.
 Doing which
 You are very safe from Marian and myself ;
 We’ll breathe as softly as the infant here,
 And stir no dangerous embers. Fail a point,
 And show our Romney wounded, ill-content,
 Tormented in his home, . . we open mouth,
 And such a noise will follow the last trump’s
 Will scarcely seem more dreadful, even to you ;
 You’ll have no pipers after : Romney will
 (I know him) push you forth as none of his,
 All other men declaring it well done ;
 While women, even the worst, your like, will draw

Their skirts back, not to brush you in
the street ;
And so I warn you. I'm . . . Aurora
Leigh.'

The letter written, I felt satisfied.
'The ashes smouldering in me, were
thrown out
By handfuls from me : I had writ my
heart
And wept my tears, and now was cool
and calm ;
And, going straightway to the neigh-
bouring room,
I lifted up the curtains of the bed
Where Marian Erle, the babe upon her
arm,
Both faces leaned together like a pair
Of folded innocences, self-complete,
Each smiling from the other, smiled
and slept.
There seemed no sin, no shame, no
wrath, no grief
I felt she too had spoken words that
night,
But softer certainly, and said to God,
Who laughs in heaven perhaps that such
as I
Should make ado for such as she.—' De-
filed'
I wrote? 'defiled' I thought her?
Stoop,
Stoop lower, Aurora! get the angels'
leave
To creep in somewhere, humbly, on
your knees,
Within this round of sequestration
white
In which they have wrapt earth's found-
lings, heaven's elect.

The next day we took train to Italy
And fled on southward in the roar of
steam.
The marriage-bells of Romney must be
loud,
To sound so clear through all. I was
not well ;
And truly, though the truth is like a
jest,
I could not choose but fancy, half the
way,
I stood alone i' the belfry, fifty bells
Of naked iron, mad with merriment,

(As one who laughs and cannot stop
himself)
All clanking at me, in me, over me,
Until I shrieked a shriek I could not
hear,
And swooned with noise,—but still,
along my swoon,
Was 'ware the baffled changes back-
ward rang,
Prepared, at each emerging sense, to
beat
And crash it out with clangour. I was
weak ;
I struggled for the posture of my soul
In upright consciousness of place and
time,
But evermore, 'twixt waking and asleep,
Slipped somehow, staggered, caught at
Marian's eyes
A moment, (it is very good for strength
To know that some one needs you to be
strong)
And so recovered what I called myself,
For that time.

I just knew it when we swept
Above the old roof of Dijon. Lyons
dropped
A spark into the night, half trodden out
Unseen. But presently the winding
Rhône
Washed out the moonlight large along
his banks,
Which strained their yielding curves
out clear and clean
To hold it,—shadow of town and castle
blurred
Upon the hurrying river. Such an air
Blew thence upon the forehead,—half an
air
And half a water,—that I leaned and
looked ;
Then, turning back on Marian, smiled to
mark
That she looked only on her child, who
slept,
His face toward the moon too.

So we passed
The liberal open country and the close,
And shot through tunnels, like a light-
ning-wedge
By great Thor-hammers driven through
the rock,
Which, quivering through the intestine
blackness, splits,

And lets it in at once : the train swept
 in
 Athrob with effort, trembling with re-
 solve,
 The fierce denouncing whistle wailing
 on
 And dying off smothered in the shud-
 dering dark,
 While we, self-awed, drew troubled
 breath, oppressed
 As other Titans underneath the pile
 And nightmare of the mountains. Out,
 at last,
 To catch the dawn afloat upon the
 land !
 —Hills, slung forth broadly and gauntly
 everywhere,
 Not cramp't in their foundations, pushing
 wide
 Rich outspreads of the vineyards and
 the corn,
 (As if they entertained i' the name of
 France)
 While, down their straining sides,
 streamed manifest
 A soil as red as Charlemagne's knightly
 blood,
 To consecrate the verdure. Some one
 said
 'Marseilles !' And lo, the city of Mar-
 seilles,
 With all her ships behind her, and be-
 yond,
 The scimitar of ever-shining sea
 For right-hand use, bared blue against
 the sky !

That night we spent between the purple
 heaven
 And purple water : I think Marian
 slept ;
 But I, as a dog a-watch for his master's
 foot,
 Who cannot sleep or eat before he
 hears,
 I sate upon the deck and watched the
 night,
 And listened through the stars for Italy.
 Those marriage-bells I spoke of, sounded
 far,
 As some child's go-cart in the street be-
 neath
 To a dying man who will not pass the
 day,

And knows it, holding by a hand he
 loves.
 I too sate quiet, satisfied with death,
 Sate silent : I could hear my own soul
 speak,
 And had my friend,—for Nature comes
 sometimes
 And says, 'I am ambassador for God.'
 I felt the wind soft from the land of
 souls ;
 The old miraculous mountains heaved in
 sight,
 One straining past another along the
 shore,
 The way of grand dull Odyssean ghosts
 Athirst to drink the cool blue wine of
 seas
 And stare on voyagers. Peak pushing
 peak
 They stood : I watched beyond that
 Tyrian belt
 Of intense sea betwixt them and the
 ship,
 Down all their sides the misty olive-
 woods
 Dissolving in the weak congenial moon,
 And still disclosing some brown convent-
 tower
 That seems as if it grew from some
 brown rock,
 Or many a little lighted village, dropt
 Like a fallen star, upon so high a point,
 You wonder what can keep it in its
 place
 From sliding headlong with the water-
 falls
 Which powder all the myrtle and orange
 groves
 With spray of silver. Thus my Italy
 Was stealing on us. Genoa broke with
 day ;
 The Doria's long pale palace striking
 out,
 From green hills in advance of the white
 town,
 A marble finger dominant to ships,
 Seen glimmering through the uncertain
 gray of dawn.

And then I did not think, 'my Italy,'
 I thought, 'my father !' O my father's
 house,
 Without his presence !—Places are too
 much

Or else too little, for immortal man ;
 Too little, when love's May o'ergrows
 the ground,—
 Too much, when that luxuriant robe of
 green
 Is rustling to our ankles in dead leaves.
 'Tis only good to be or here or there,
 Because we had a dream on such a stone,
 Or this or that,—but, once being wholly
 waked,
 And come back to the stone without a
 dream,
 We trip upon't,—alas ! and hurt our-
 selves ;
 Or else it falls on us and grinds us flat,
 The heaviest grave-stone on this bury-
 ing earth.
 —But while I stood and mused, a quiet
 touch
 Fell light upon my arm, and, turning
 round,
 A pair of moistened eyes convicted
 mine.
 'What, Marian ! is the babe astir so
 soon ?'
 'He sleeps,' she answered ; 'I have
 crept up thrice,
 And seen you sitting, standing, still at
 watch.
 I thought it did you good till now, but
 now' . . .
 'But now,' I said, 'you leave the child
 alone.'
 'And you're alone,' she answered,—and
 she looked
 As if I too were something. Sweet the
 help
 Of one we have helped ! Thanks, Ma-
 rian, for such help.

I found a house at Florence on the hill
 Of Bellosguardo. 'Tis a tower that
 keeps
 A post of double-observation o'er
 The valley of Arno (holding as a hand
 The outspread city) straight toward Fic-
 sole
 And Mount Morello and the setting sun,
 The Vallombrosan mountains opposite,
 Which sunrise fills as full as crystal cups
 Turned red to the brim because their
 wine was red.
 No sun could die nor yet be born unseen
 By dwellers at my villa : morn and eve

Were magnified before us in the pure
 Illimitable space and pause of sky,
 Intense as angels' garments blanched
 with God,
 Less blue and radiant. From the outer
 wall
 Of the garden, drops the mystic floating
 gray
 Of olive-trees, (with interruptions green
 From maize and vine) until 'tis caught
 and torn
 Upon the abrupt black line of cypresses
 Which signs the way to Florence. Beau-
 tiful
 The city lies along the ample vale,
 Cathedral, tower and palace, piazza and
 street,
 The river trailing like a silver cord
 Through all, and curling loosely, both
 before
 And after, over the broad stretch of land
 Sown whitely up and down its opposite
 slopes
 With farm and villas.

Many weeks had passed,
 No word was granted.—Last, a letter
 came
 From Vincent Carrington :—'My dear
 Miss Leigh,
 You've been as silent as a poet should,
 When any other man is sure to speak.
 If sick, if vexed, if dumb, a silver-piece
 Will split a man's tongue,—straight he
 speaks and says,
 'Received that cheque.' But you ! . .
 I send you funds
 To Paris, and you make no sign at all.
 Remember I'm responsible and wait
 A sign of you, Miss Leigh.

'Meantime your book
 Is eloquent as if you were not dumb ;
 And common critics, ordinarily deaf
 To such fine meanings, and, like deaf
 men, loth
 To seem deaf, answering chance-wise,
 yes or no,
 'It must be,' or 'it must not,' (most
 pronounced
 When least convinced) pronounced for
 once aright :
 You'd think they really heard,—and so
 they do . .
 The burr of three or four who really
 hear

And praise your book aright: Fame's
 smallest trump
 Is a great ear-trumpet for the deaf as
 posts,
 No other being effective. Fear not,
 friend;
 We think here you have written a good
 book,
 And you, a woman! It was in you—yes,
 I felt 'twas in you; yet I doubted half
 If that od-force of German Reichen-
 bach
 Which still from female finger-tips burns
 blue,
 Could strike out as our masculine white
 heats,
 To quicken a man. Forgive me. All
 my heart
 Is quick with yours since, just a fortnight
 since,
 I read your book and loved it.
 'Will you love
 My wife, too? Here's my secret I might
 keep
 A month more from you! but I yield it
 up
 Because I know you'll write the sooner
 for't,
 Most women (of your height even)
 counting love
 Life's only serious business. Who's my
 wife
 That shall be in a month? you ask? nor
 guess?
 Remember what a pair of topaz eyes
 You once detected, turned against the
 wall,
 That morning in my London painting-
 room;
 The face half-sketched, and slurred;
 the eyes alone!
 But you . . . you caught them up with
 yours, and said
 'Kate Ward's eyes, surely.'—Now, I
 own the truth,
 I had thrown them there to keep them
 safe from Jove;
 They would so naughtily find out their
 way
 To both the heads of both my Danaes,
 Where just it made me mad to look at
 them.
 Such eyes! I could not paint or think of
 eyes

But those,—and so I flung them into
 paint
 And turned them to the wall's care.
 Ay, but now
 I've let them out, my Kate's: I've
 painted her,
 (I'll change my style, and leave mytho-
 logies)
 The whole sweet face; it looks upon
 my soul
 Like a face on water, to beget itself,
 A half-length portrait, in a hanging cloak
 Like one you wore once; 'tis a little
 frayed;
 I pressed too for the nude harmonious
 arm—
 But she . . . she'd have her way, and have
 her cloak;
 She said she could be like you only so,
 And would not miss the fortune. Ah,
 my friend,
 You'll write and say she shall not miss
 your love
 Through meeting mine? in faith, she
 would not change;
 She has your books by heart more than
 my words,
 And quotes you up against me till I'm
 pushed
 Where, three months since, her eyes
 were: nay, in fact,
 Nought satisfied her but to make me
 paint
 Your last book folded in her dimpled
 hands
 Instead of my brown palette, as I
 wished,
 And, granted me, the presentment had
 been newer;
 She'd grant me nothing: I've com-
 pounded for
 The naming of the wedding-day next
 month,
 And gladly too. 'Tis pretty, to remark
 How women can love women of your
 sort,
 And tie their hearts with love-knots to
 your feet,
 Grow insolent about you against men,
 And put us down by putting up the lip,
 As if a man,—there *are* such, let us own,
 Who write not ill,—remains a man, poor
 wretch,

While you——! Write weaker than
Aurora Leigh,
And there'll be women who believe of
you
(Besides my Kate) that if you walked on
sand

You would not leave a foot-print.

'Are you put
To wonder by my marriage, like poor
Leigh?

'Kate Ward!' he said. 'Kate Ward!'—
he said anew.

'I thought . . . ' he said, and stopped,—
'I did not think . . . '

And then he dropped to silence.

'Ah, he's changed.
I had not seen him, you're aware, for
long,

But went of course. I have not touched
on this

Through all this letter,—conscious of
your heart,

And writing lightlier for the heavy fact,
As clocks are voluble with lead.

'How poor,
To say I'm sorry. Dear Leigh, dearest
Leigh!

In those old days of Shropshire,—pardon
me,—

When he and you fought many a field
of gold

On what you should do, or you should
not do,

Make bread or verses, (it just came to
that)

I thought you'd one day draw a silken
peace

Through a golden ring. I thought so.
Foolishly,

The event proved,—for you went more
opposite

To each other, month by month, and
year by year,

Until this happened. God knows best,
we say,

But hoarsely. When the fever took him
first,

Just after I had writ to you in France,
They tell me Lady Waldemar mixed
drinks

And counted grains, like any salaried
nurse,

Excepting that she wept too. Then
Lord Howe,

You're right about Lord Howe, Lord
Howe's a trump;

And yet, with such in his hand, a man
like Leigh

May lose, as *he* does. 'There's an end to
all,—

Yes, even this letter, though this second
sheet

May find you doubtful. Write a word
for Kate:

She reads my letters always, like a wife,
And if she sees her name, I'll see her
smile

And share the luck. So, bless you,
friend of two!

I will not ask you what your feeling is
At Florence with my pictures. I can hear
Your heart a-flutter over the snow-hills:

And, just to pace the Pitti with you
once,

I'd give a half-hour of to-morrow's walk
With Kate . . . I think so. Vincent Car-
rington.

The noon was hot; the air scorched like
the sun

And was shut out. The closed persian
threw

Their long-scored shadows on my villa-
floor,

And interlined the golden atmosphere
Straight, still,—across the pictures on the
wall

The statuette on the console, (of young
Love

And Psyche made one marble by a kiss)
The low couch where I leaned, the table
near,

The vase of lilies Marian pulled last
night

(Each green leaf and each white leaf
ruled in black

As if for writing some new text of fate)
And the open letter, rested on my knee,
But there, the lines swerved, trembled,
though I sate

Untroubled . . . plainly, . . . reading it
again

And three times. Well, he's married;
that is clear.

No wonder that he's married, nor much
more

That Vincent's therefore 'sorry.' Why,
of course,

'The lady nursed him when he was not
 well,
 Mixed drinks,—unless nepenthe was the
 drink
 'Twas scarce worth telling. But a man
 in love
 Will see the whole sex in his mistress'
 hood,
 'The prettier for its lining of fair rose ;
 Although he catches back and says at
 last,
 'I'm sorry.' Sorry. Lady Waldemar
 At prettiest, under the said hood, pre-
 served
 From such a light as I could hold to her
 face
 To flare its ugly wrinkles out to shame,
 Is scarce a wife for Romney, as friends
 judge,
 Aurora Leigh, or Vincent Carrington,
 That's plain. And if he's 'conscious of
 my heart' . . .
 It may be natural, though the phrase is
 strong ;
 (One's apt to use strong phrases, being
 in love)
 And even that stuff of 'fields of gold,'
 'gold rings,'
 And what he 'thought,' poor Vincent !
 what he 'thought,'
 May never mean enough to ruffle me.
 —Why, this room stifles. Better burn
 than choke :
 Best have air, air, although it comes with
 fire,
 Throw open blinds and windows to the
 noon
 And take a blister on my brow instead
 Of this dead weight ! best, perfectly be
 stunned
 By those insufferable cicale, sick
 And hoarse with rapture of the summer
 heat,
 That sing like poets, till their hearts
 break, . . . sing
 Till men say, 'It's too tedious.'
 Books succeed,
 And lives fail. Do I feel it so, at last ?
 Kate loves a worn-out cloak for being
 like mine,
 While I live self-despised for being my-
 self,
 And yearn toward some one else, who
 yearns away

From what he is, in his turn. Strain a
 step
 For ever, yet gain no step ? Are we
 such,
 We cannot, with our admirations even,
 Our tip-toe aspirations, touch a thing
 That's higher than we ? is all a dismal
 flat,
 And God alone above each,—as the sun
 O'er level lagunes, to make them shine
 and stink,—
 Laying stress upon us with immediate
 flame,
 While we respond with our miasmal fog,
 And call it mounting higher because we
 grow
 More highly fatal ?
 Tush, Aurora Leigh !
 You wear your sackcloth looped in
 Cæsar's way,
 And brag your failings as mankind's. Be
 still.
 There *is* what's higher, in this very
 world,
 Than you can live, or catch at. Stand
 aside,
 And look at others—instance little Kate !
 She'll make a perfect wife for Carrington.
 She always has been looking round the
 earth
 For something good and green to alight
 upon
 And nestle into, with those soft-winged
 eyes
 Subsiding now beneath his manly hand
 'Twixt trembling lids of inexpressive
 joy :
 I will not scorn her, after all, too much,
 That so much she should love me. A
 wise man
 Can pluck a leaf, and find a lecture in't ;
 And I, too, . . . God has made me,—I've
 a heart
 That's capable of worship, love and loss ;
 We say the same of Shakspeare's. I'll
 be meek,
 And learn to reverence, even this poor
 myself.
 The book, too—pass it. 'A good book,'
 says he,
 'And you a woman.' I had laughed at
 that,
 But long since. I'm a woman,—it is true ;

Alas, and woe to us, when we feel it
most !

Then, least care have we for the crowns
and goals

And compliments on writing our good
books.

The book has some truth in it, I believe :
And truth outlives pain, as the soul does
life.

I know we talk our Phædons to the end
Through all the dismal faces that we
make,

O'er-wrinkled with dishonoring agony
From decomposing drugs. I have writ-
ten truth,

And I a woman ; feebly, partially,
Inaptly in presentation, Romney'll add,
Because a woman. For the truth itself,
That's neither man's nor woman's, but
just God's ;

None else has reason to be proud of
truth :

Himself will see it sifted, disenthralled,
And kept upon the height and in the
light,

As far as and no farther than 'tis truth ;
For,—now He has left off calling firma-
ments

And strata, flowers and creatures, very
good,

He says it still of truth, which is His
own.

Truth, so far, in my book ;—the truth
which draws

Through all things upwards ; that a two-
fold world

Must go to a perfect cosmos. Natural
things

And spiritual,—who separates those two
In art, in morals, or the social drift,
Tears up the bond of nature and brings
death,

Paints futile pictures, writes unreal verse,
Leads vulgar days, deals ignorantly
with men,

Is wrong, in short, at all points. We
divide

This apple of life, and cut it through
the pips,—

The perfect round which fitted Venus'
hand

Has perished as utterly as if we ate

Both halves. Without the spiritual, ob-
serve,

The natural's impossible ; no form,
No motion ! Without sensuous, spirit-
ual

Is inappreciable ;—no beauty or power :
And in this twofold sphere the twofold
man

(And still the artist is intensely a man)
Holds firmly by the natural, to reach

The spiritual beyond it,—fixes still

The type with mortal vision, to pierce
through,

With eyes immortal, to the antetype
Some call the ideal,—better called the
real,

And certain to be called so presently
When things shall have their names.

Look long enough

On any peasant's face here, coarse and
lined,

You'll catch Antinous somewhere in that
clay,

As perfect featured as he yearns at
Rome

From marble pale with beauty ; then
persist,

And, if your apprehension's competent,
You'll find some fairer angel at his back,

As much exceeding him as he the boor,
And pushing him with imperial disdain

For ever out of sight. Ay, Carrington
Is glad of such a creed : an artist must,

Who paints a tree, a leaf, a common
stone,

With just his hand, and finds it sud-
denly

A-piece with and conterminous to his
soul.

Why else do these things move him,
leaf or stone ?

The bird's not moved, that pecks at a
spring-shoot ;

Nor yet the horse before a quarry
a-graze :

But man, the two-fold creature, appre-
hends

The two-fold manner, in and outwardly,
And nothing in the world comes single

to him,
A mere itself,—cup, column, or candle-
stick,

All patterns of what shall be in the
Mount ;

The whole temporal show related royally,
 And built up to eterne significance
 Through the open arms of God. 'There's
 nothing great
 Nor small,' has said a poet of our day,
 Whose voice will ring beyond the curfew
 of eve
 And not be thrown out by the matin's
 bell :
 And truly, I reiterate, . . . nothing's small !
 No lily-muffled hum of a summer-bee.
 But finds some coupling with the spinning
 stars ;
 No pebble at your foot, but proves a
 sphere ;
 No chaffinch, but implies the cherubim :
 And,—glancing on my own thin, veined
 wrist,—
 In such a little tremour of the blood
 The whole strong clamour of a vehement
 soul
 Doth utter itself distinct. Earth's
 crammed with heaven,
 And every common bush afire with
 God :
 But only he who sees, takes off his
 shoes,
 The rest sit round it and pluck blackberries,
 And daub their natural faces unaware
 More and more from the first similitude.
 Truth so far, in my book ! a truth which
 draws
 From all things upward. I, Aurora,
 still
 Have felt it hound me through the
 wastes of life
 As Jove did Io : and, until that Hand
 Shall overtake me wholly, and on my
 head
 Lay down its large unfluctuating peace,
 The feverish gad-fly pricks me up and
 down,
 It must be. Art's the witness of what is
 Behind this show. If this world's show
 were all,
 Then imitation would be all in Art ;
 There, Jove's hand gripes us!—for we
 stand here, we,
 If genuine artists, witnessing for God's
 Complete, consummate, undivided
 work :

—That every natural flower which
 grows on earth,
 Implies a flower upon the spiritual side,
 Substantial, archetypal, all a-glow
 With blossoming causes,—not so far
 away,
 That we, whose spirit-sense is somewhat
 cleared,
 May catch at something of the bloom
 and breath,—
 Too vaguely apprehended, though indeed
 Still apprehended, consciously or not,
 And still transferred to picture, music,
 verse,
 For thrilling audient and beholding souls
 By signs and touches which are known
 to souls.
 How known they know not,—why, they
 cannot find,
 So straight call out on genius, say, 'A
 man
 Produced this,' when much rather they
 should say,
 'Tis insight, and he saw this.'
 Thus is Art
 Self-magnified in magnifying a truth
 Which, fully recognised, would change
 the world
 And shift its morals. If a man could
 feel,
 Not one day, in the artist's ecstasy.
 But every day, feast, fast, or working-
 day,
 The spiritual significance burn through
 The hieroglyphic of material shows,
 Henceforward he would paint the globe
 with wings,
 And reverence fish and fowl, the bull,
 the tree,
 And even his very body as a man,—
 Which now he counts so vile, that all
 the towns
 Make offal of their daughters for its use
 On summer-nights, when God is sad in
 heaven
 To think what goes on in his recreant
 world
 He made quite other ; while that moon
 He made
 To shine there, at the first love's cove-
 nant,
 Shines still, convictive as a marriage-ring
 Before adulterous eyes.

How sure it is,
That, if we say a true word, instantly
We feel 'tis God's, not ours, and pass it
on .

As bread at sacrament we taste and pass
Nor handle for a moment, as indeed
We dared to set up any claim to such !
And I—my poem ;—let my readers talk.
I'm closer to it—I can speak as well :
I'll say with Romney, that the book is
weak,

The range uneven, the points of sight
obscure,
The music interrupted.

Let us go.

The end of woman (or of man, I think)
Is not a book, Alas, the best of books
Is but a word in Art, which soon grows
cramped,
Stiff, dubious-statured with the weight
of years,
And drops an accent or digamma down
Some cranny of unfathomable time,
Beyond the critic's reaching. Art itself,
We've called the higher life, must feel
the soul
Live past it. For more's felt than is
perceived,
And more's perceived than can be in-
terpreted,
And Love strikes higher with his lam-
bent flame
Than Art can pile the fagots.

Is it so ?

When Jove's hand meets us with com-
posing touch,
And when at last we are hushed and
satisfied,
Then Io does not call it truth, but love ?
Well, well ! my father was an English-
man :
My mother's blood in me is not so strong
That I should bear this stress of Tuscan
noon
And keep my wits. The town, there,
seems to seethe
In this Medæan boil-pot of the sun,
And all the patient hills are bubbling
round
As if a prick would leave them flat.
Does heaven
Keep far off, not to set us in a blaze ?
Not so,—let drag your fiery fringes,
heaven,

And burn us up to quiet ! Ah, we know
Too much here, not to know what's best
for peace ;

We have too much light here, not to
want more fire

To purify and end us. We talk, talk,
Conclude upon divine philosophies,
And get the thanks of men for lopeful
books ;

Whereat we take our own life up, and
. . pshaw !

Unless we piece it with another's life,
(A yard of silk to carry out our lawn)
As well suppose my little handkerchief
Would cover Samminiato, church an
all,

If out I threw it past the cypresses,
As, in this ragged, narrow life of mine,
Contain my own conclusions.

But at least
We'll shut up the persiani and sit down,
And when my head's done aching in the
cool,

Write just a word to Kate and Carrington.

May joy be with them ! she has chosen
well,
And he not ill.

I should be glad, I think,
Except for Romney. Had *he* married
Kate,

I surely, surely, should be very glad.

This Florence sits upon me easily,
With native air and tongue. My graves
are calm,

And do not too much hurt me. Ma-
rian's good,

Gentle and loving,—lets me hold the
child,

Or drags him up the hills to find me
flowers

And fill those vases ere I'm quite
awake,—

The grandiose red tulips, which grow
wild,

Or Dante's purple lilies, which he blew
To a larger bubble with his prophet
breath ;

Or one of those tall flowering reeds that
stand

In Arno like a sheaf of sceptres left
By some remote dynasty of dead gods,
To suck the stream for ages and get
green,

And blossom wheresoe'r a hand divine
Had warmed the place with ichor.

Such I find

At early morning laid across my bed,
And woke up pelted with a childish
laugh

Which even Marian's low precipitous
'hush'

Had vainly interposed to put away,—
While I, with shut eyes, smile and mo-
tion for

The dewy kiss that's very sure to come
From mouth and cheeks, the whole
child's face at once

Dissolved on mine,—as if a nosegay
burst

Its string with the weight of roses over-
blown,

And dropt upon me. Surely I should be
glad.

The little creature almost loves me now,
And calls my name . . 'Alola,' stripping
off

The *rs* like thorns, to make it smooth
enough

To take between his dainty, milk-fed
lips.

God love him ! I should certainly be glad,
Except, God help me, that I'm sorrow-
ful,

Because of Romney.

Romney, Romney ! Well,
This grows absurd !—too like a tune that
runs

I' the head, and forces all things in the
world,

Wind, rain, the creaking gnat or stutter-
ing fly,

To sing itself and vex you ;—yet per-
haps

A paltry tune you never fairly liked,
Some 'I'd be a butterfly,' or 'C'est
l'amour :'

We're made so,—not such tyrants to
ourselves

But still we are slaves to nature. Some
of us

Are turned, too, overmuch like some
poor verse

With a trick of *ritournelle* : the same
thing goes

And comes back ever.

Vincent Carrington

Is 'sorry,' and I'm sorry ; but *he's* strong

To mount from sorrow to his heaven of
love,

And when he says at moments, 'Poor,
poor Leigh,

Who'll never call his own so true a heart,
So fair a face even,'—he must quickly
lose

The pain of pity in the blush he makes
By his very pitying eyes. The snow,
for him,

Has fallen in May, and finds the whole
earth warm,

And melts at the first touch of the green
grass.

But Romney,—he has chosen, after all.
I think he had as excellent a sun

To see by, as most others, and perhaps
Hasscarce seen really worse than some
of us,

When all's said. Let him pass. I'm
not too much

A woman, not to be a man for once
And bury all my Dead like Alaric,

Depositing the treasures of my soul
In this drained water-course, then letting
flow

The river of life again with commerce-
ships

And pleasure-barges, full of silks and
songs.

Blow winds, and help us.

Ah, we mock ourselves
With talking of the winds ! perhaps as
much

With other resolutions. How it weighs,
This hot, sick air ! and how I covet here

The Dead's provision on the river-couch
With silver curtains drawn on tinkling
rings !

Or else their rest in quiet crypts,—laid by
From heat and noise:—from those *cicale*,
say,

And this more vexing heart-beat.

So it is :

We covet for the soul, the body's part,
To die and rot. Even so, Aurora, ends

Our aspiration, who bespoke our place
So far in the east. The occidental flats

Had fed us fatter, therefore ? we have
climbed

Where herbage ends ? we want the
beast's part now

And tire of the angel's ?—Men define a
man,

The creature who stands front-ward to
the stars,
The creature who looks inward to him-
self,
The tool - wright, laughing creature.
'Tis enough :
We'll say, instead, the inconsequent
creature, man,
For that's his speciality. What creature
else
Conceives the circle, and then walks the
square ?
Loves things proved bad, and leaves a
thing proved good ?
You think the bee makes honey half a
year,
To loathe the comb in winter and desire
The little ant's food rather ? But a man—
Note men !—they are but women after
all.
As women are but Auroras !—there are
men
Born tender, apt to pale at a trodden
worm,
Who paint for pastime, in their favorite
dream,
Spruce auto-vestments flowered with
crocus-flames :
There are two, who believe in heaven,
and fear :
There are, who waste their souls in
working out
Life's problem on these sands betwixt
two tides,
Concluding,—‘ Give us the oyster's part,
in death.’

Alas, long - suffering and most patient
God,
Thou need'st be surelier God to bear
with us
Than even to have made us ! thou aspire,
aspire
From henceforth for me ! thou who hast
thyself
Enlured this fleshhood, knowing how
as a soaked
And sucking vesture it can drag us
down
And choke us in the melancholy Deep,
Sustain me, that with thee I walk these
waves,
Resisting !—breathe me upwar', thou in
me

Aspiring, who art the way, the truth,
the life,—
That no truth henceforth seem indiffer-
ent,
No way to truth laborious, and no life,
Not even this life I live, intolerable !

The days went by. I took up the old
days
With all their Tuscan pleasures worn
and spoiled
Like some lost book we dropt in the long
grass
On such a happy summer-afternoon
When last we read it with a loving
friend,
And find in autumn when the friend is
gone,
The grass cut short, the weather
changed, too late,
And stare at, as at something wonderful
For sorrow,—thinking how two hands
before
Had held up what is left to only one,
And how we smiled when such a vehem-
ent nail
Impressed the tiny dint here which pre-
sents
This verse in fire for ever. Tenderly
And mournfully I lived. I knew the
birds
And insects,—which looked fathered
by the flowers
And emulous of their hues : I recog-
nized
The moths, with the great overpoise of
wings
Which makes a mystery of them how at
all
They can stop flying : butterflies, that
bear
Upon their blue wings such red embers
round,
They seem to scorch the blue air into
holes
Each flight they take : and fire-flies
that expire
In short soft lapses of transported flame,
Across the tingling Dark, while over-
head
The constant and inviolable stars
Outburn those lights-of-love : melodious
owls,
(If music had but one note and was sad,

'Twould sound just so) and all the silent
 swirl
 Of bats that seem to follow in the air
 Some grand circumference of a shadowy
 dome
 To which we are blind : and then the
 nightingales,
 Which pluck our heart across a garden-
 wall
 (When walking in the town) and carry
 it
 So high into the bowery almond-trees,
 We tremble and are afraid, and feel as if
 The golden flood of moonlight unaware
 Dissolved the pillars of the steady earth
 And made it less substantial. And I
 knew
 The harmless opal snakes, and large
 mouthed frogs
 (Those noisy vaunters of their shallow
 streams)
 And lizards, the green lightnings of the
 wall,
 Which, if you sit down quiet nor sigh
 loud,
 Will flatter you and take you for a
 stone,
 And flash familiarly about your feet
 With such prodigious eyes in such small
 heads !—
 I knew them, though they had somewhat
 dwindled from
 My childish imagery,—and kept in
 mind
 How last I sat among them equally,
 In fellowship and mateship, as a child
 Feels equal still toward insect, beast,
 and bird,
 Before the Adam in him has foregone
 All privilege of Eden,—making friends
 And talk, with such a bird or such a goat,
 And buying many a two-inch-wide rush-
 cage
 To let out the caged cricket on a tree,
 Saying, 'Oh, my dear grillino, were
 you cramped ?
 And are you happy with the ilex-leaves ?
 And do you love me who have let you
 go ?
 Say *yes* in singing, and I'll understand.'
 But now the creatures all seemed farther
 off,
 No longer mine, nor like me ; only *there*,

A gulph between us. I could yearn in-
 deed,
 Like other rich men, for a drop of dew
 'To cool this heat,—a drop of the early
 dew,
 The irrecoverable child innocence
 (Before the heart took fire and withered
 life)
 When childhood might pair equally
 with birds ;
 But now . . the birds were grown too
 proud for us !
 Alas, the very sun forbids the dew.
 And I, I had come back to an empty
 nest,
 Which every bird's too wise for. How
 I heard
 My father's step on that deserted ground,
 His voice along that silence, as he told
 The names of bird and insect, tree and
 flower,
 And all the presentations of the stars
 Across Valdarno, interposing still
 'My child,' 'my child.' When fathers
 say 'my child,'
 'Tis easier to conceive the universe,
 And life's transitions down the steps of
 law.
 I rode once to the little mountain-house
 As fast as if to find my father there,
 But when in sight of't, within fifty yards,
 I dropped my horse's bridle on his neck
 And paused upon his flank. The house's
 front
 Was cased with lingots of ripe Indian
 corn
 In tessellated order and device
 Of golden patterns : not a stone of wall
 Uncovered,—not an inch of room to
 grow
 A vine-leaf. The old porch had disap-
 peared ;
 And right in the open doorway, sate a
 girl
 At plaiting straws,—her black hair
 strained away
 To a scarlet kerchief caught beneath her
 chin
 In Tuscan fashion,—her full ebon eyes,
 Which looked too heavy to be lifted so,
 Still dropt and lifted toward the mul-
 berry-tree

On which the lads were busy with their
staves
In shout and laughter, stripping every
bough
As bare as winter, of those summer
leaves
My father had not changed for all the
silk
In which the ugly silkworms hide them-
selves.
Enough. My horse recoiled before my
heart.
I turned the rein abruptly. Back we
went as fast, to Florence.

That was trial enough
Of graves. I would not visit, if I could,
My father's, or my mother's any more,
To see if stone-cutter or lichen beat
So early in the race, or throw my flowers,
Which could not out-smell heaven or
sweeten earth.
They live too far above, that I should
look
So far below to find them : let me think
That rather they are visiting my grave,
This life here, (undeveloped yet to life)
And that they drop upon me, now and
then,
For token or for solace, some small weed
Least odorous of the growths of paradise,
'To spare such pungent scents as kill with
joy.
My old Assunta, too, was dead, was
dead—
O land of all men's past ! for me alone,
It would not mix its tenses. I was past,
It seemed, like others,—only not in
heaven.
And, many a Tuscan eve I wandered
down
The cypress alley like a restless ghost
That tries its feeble ineffectual breath
Upon its own charred funeral-brands
put out
'Too soon,—where black and stiff stood
up the trees
Against the broad vermilion of the
skies.
Such skies!—all clouds abolished in a
sweep
Of God's skirt, with a dazzle to ghosts
and men,
As down I went, saluting on the bridge

The hem of such before 'twas caught
away
Beyond the peaks of Lucca. Under-
neath,
The river just escaping from the weight
Of that intolerable glory, ran
In acquiescent shadow murmuringly :
While up beside it, streamed the festa-
folk
With fellow-murmurs from their feet
and fans,
And *issimo* and *ino* and sweet poise
Of vowels in their pleasant scandalous
talk ;
Returning from the grand-duke's dairy-
farm
Before the trees grew dangerous at
eight,
(For, 'trust no tree by moonlight,'
Tuscans say)
To eat their ice at Donay's tenderly,—
Each lovely lady close to a cavalier
Who holds her dear fan while she feeds
her smile
On meditative spoonfuls of vanille,
And listens to his hot-breathed vows of
love,
Enough to thaw her cream and scorch
his beard.
'Twas little matter. I could pass them by
Indifferently, not fearing to be known.
No danger of being wrecked upon a
friend,
And forced to take an iceberg for an isle !
The very English, here, must wait and
learn
To hang the cobweb of their gossip out
And catch a fly. I'm happy. It's sub-
lime,
This perfect solitude of foreign lands !
To be, as if you had not been till then,
And were then, simply what you choose
to be ;
To spring up, not be brought forth from
the ground
Like grasshoppers at Athens, and skip
thrice
Before a woman makes a pounce on you
And plants you in her hair !—possess,
yourself,
A new world all alive with creatures
new,
New sun, new moon, new flowers, new
people—ah.

And be possessed by none of them! no right
 In one, to call your name, enquire your where,
 Or what you think of Mister Some-one's book,
 Or Mister Other's marriage or decease,
 Or how's the headache which you had last week,
 Or why you look so pale still, since it's gone?
 —Such most surprising riddance of one's life
 Comes next one's death; 'tis disembodiment
 Without the pang. I marvel, people choose
 To stand stock-still like fakirs, till the moss
 Grows on them and they cry out, self-admired,
 'How verdant and how virtuous!' Well, I'm glad
 Or should be, if grown foreign to myself
 As surely as to others.

Musing so,

I walked the narrow unrecognising streets,
 Where many a palace-front peers gloomily
 Through stony vizors iron-barred, (prepared
 Alike, should foe or lover pass that way,
 For guest or victim) and came wandering out
 Upon the churches with mild open doors
 And plaintive wail of vespers, where a few,
 Those chiefly women, sprinkled round in blots
 Upon the dusky pavement, knelt and prayed
 Toward the altar's silver glory. Oft a ray
 (I liked to sit and watch would tremble out,
 Just touch some face more lifted, more in need,
 Of course a woman's—while I dreamed a tale
 To fit its fortunes. There was one who looked
 As if the earth had suddenly grown too large

For such a little humpbacked thing as she;
 The pitiful black kerchief round her neck
 Sole proof she had had a mother. One, again,
 Looked sick for love,—seemed praying some soft saint
 To put more virtue in the new fine scarf
 She spent a fortnight's meals on, yesterday,
 That cruel Gigi might return his eyes
 From Giuliana. There was one, so old,
 So old, to kneel grew easier than to stand,—
 Sosolitary, she accepts at last
 Our Lady for her gossip, and frets on
 Against the sinful world which goes its rounds
 In marrying and being married, just the same
 As when 'twas almost good and had the right,
 (Her Gian alive, and she herself eighteen).
 And yet, now even, if Madonna willed,
 She'd win a tern in Thursday's lottery
 'And better all things. Did she dream for nought,
 That, boiling cabbage for the fast-day's soup,
 It smelt like blessed entrails? such a dream
 For nought! would sweetest Mary cheat her so,
 And lose that certain candle, straight and white
 As any fair grand-duchess in her teens,
 Which otherwise should flare here in a week?
Benigna sis, thou beauteous Queen of heaven!
 I sate there musing and imagining
 Such utterance from such faces: poor blind souls
 That writhed toward heaven along the devil's trail,—
 Who knows, I thought, but He may stretch his hand
 And pick them up? 'tis written in the Book
 He heareth the young ravens when they cry;

And yet they cry for carrion.—O my God,

And we, who make excuses for the rest,
We do it in our measure. Then I knelt,
And dropped my head upon the pavement too,

And prayed, since I was foolish in desire
Like other creatures, craving offal-food,
That He would stop his ears to what I said,

And only listen to the run and beat
Of this poor, passionate, helpless blood—

And then
I lay, and spoke not. But He heard in heaven.

So many Tuscan evenings passed the same.

I could not lose a sunset on the bridge,
And would not miss a vigil in the church,
And liked to mingle with the out-door crowd

So strange and gay and ignorant of my face,

For men you know not, are as good as trees.

And only once, at the Santissima,
I almost chanced upon a man I knew,
Sir Blaise Delorme. He saw me certainly,

And somewhat hurried, as he crossed himself,

The smoothness of the action,—then half bowed,

But only half, and merely to my shade,
I slipped so quick behind the porphyry plinth

And left him dubious if 'twas really I,
Or peradventure Satan's usual trick
To keep a mounting saint uncanonised.
But he was safe for that time, and I too;
The argent angels in the altar-flare
Absorbed his soul next moment. The good man!

In England we were scarce acquaintances,

That here in Florence he should keep my thought

Beyond the image on his eye, which came

And went: and yet his thought disturbed my life:

For, after that, I oftener sat at home
On evenings, watching how they fined themselves

With gradual conscience to a perfect night,

Until the moon, diminished to a curve,
Lay out there like a sickle for His hand
Who cometh down at last to reap the earth.

At such times, ended seemed my trade of verse;

I feared to jingle bells upon my robe
Before the four-faced silent cherubim;
With God so near me, could I sing of God?

I did not write, nor read, nor even think,

But sate absorbed amid the quickening glooms,

Most like some passive broken lump of salt

Dropt in by chance to a bowl of cœnomel,

To spoil the drink a little and lose itself,
Dissolving slowly, slowly, until lost.

EIGHTH BOOK.

ONE eve it happened when I sate alone,
Alone upon the terrace of my tower,
A book upon my knees to counterfeit
The reading that I never read at all,
While Marian, in the garden down below,

Knelt by the fountain I could just hear thrill

The drowsy silence of the exhausted day,

And peeled a new fig from that purple heap

In the grass beside her,—turning out the red

To feed her eager child, who sucked at it

With vehement lips across a gap of air
As he stood opposite, face and curls

a-flame
With that last sun-ray, crying, 'give me, give,'

And stamping with imperious baby-feet,

(We're all born princes) — something startled me,—

The laugh of sad and innocent souls,
that breaks

Abruptly, as if frightened at itself ;
 'Twas Marian laughed. I saw her
 glance above
 In sudden shame that I should hear her
 laugh,
 And straightway dropped my eyes upon
 my book,
 And knew, the first time, 'twas Bocca-
 cio's tale,
 The Falcon's, — of the lover who for
 love
 Destroyed the best that loved him.
 Some of us
 Do it still, and then we sit and laugh no
 more.
 Laugh *you*, sweet Marian ! you've the
 right to laugh,
 Since God himself is for you, and a
 child !
 For me there's somewhat less,—and so I
 sigh.

The heavens were making room to hold
 the night,
 The seven-fold heavens unfolding all
 their gates
 To let the stars out slowly (prophesied
 In close-approaching advent, not dis-
 cerned),
 While still the cue-owls from the
 cypresses
 Of the poggio called and counted every
 pulse
 Of the skyey palpitation. Gradually
 The purple and transparent shadows
 slow
 Had filled up the whole valley to the
 brim,
 And flooded all the city, which you
 saw
 As some drowned city in some enchanted
 sea,
 Cut off from nature,—drawing you who
 gaze,
 With passionate desire, to leap and
 plunge
 And find a sea-king with a voice of
 waves,
 And treacherous soft eyes, and slippery
 locks
 You cannot kiss but you shall bring
 away
 Their salt upon your lips. The duomo-
 bell

Strikes ten, as if it struck ten fathoms
 down,
 So deep ; and fifty churches answer it
 The same with twenty various instances.
 Some gaslights tremble along squares
 and streets ;
 The Pitti's palace-front is drawn in fire :
 And, past the quays, Maria Novella
 Place,
 In which the mystic obelisks stand up
 Triangular, pyramidal, each based
 Upon its four-square brazen tortoises,
 To guard that fair church, Buonarotti's
 Bride,
 That stares out from her large blind
 dial-eyes,
 Her quadrant and armillary dials, black
 With rhythms of many suns and moons,
 in vain
 Enquiry for so rich a soul as his.
 Methinks I have plunged, I see it all so
 clear . . .
 And, oh my heart , . . the sea-king !

In my ears

The sound of waters. There he stood,
 my king !

I felt him, rather than beheld him. Up
 I rose, as if he were my king indeed,
 And then sate down, in trouble at my-
 self,
 And struggling for my woman's empery.
 'Tis pitiful ; but women are so made :
 We'll die for you perhaps,—'tis proba-
 ble ;
 But we'll not spare you an inch of our
 full height :
 We'll have our whole just stature,—five
 feet four,
 Though laid out in our coffins : pitiful !
 —' You, Romney !—Lady Waldemar
 is here ?'

He answered in a voice which was not
 his,
 'I have her letter ; you shall read it
 soon.
 But first, I must be heard a little, I,
 Who have waited long and travelled far
 for that,
 Although you thought to have shut a
 tedious book
 And farewell. Ah, you dog-eared such
 a page,

And here you find me.'

Did he touch my hand,
Or but my sleeve? I trembled, hand
and foot,—

He must have touched me.—'Will you
sit?' I asked,

And motioned to a chair; but down he
sate,

A little slowly, as a man in doubt,
Upon the couch beside me,—couch and
chair

Being wheeled upon the terrace.

'You are come,
My cousin Romney?—this is wonder-
ful.

But all is wonder on such summer-
nights;

And nothing should surprise us any
more,

Who see that miracle of stars. Behold.'

I signed above, where all the stars were
out,

As if an urgent heat had started there
A secret writing from a sombre page,
A blank last moment, crowded suddenly
With hurrying splendors.

'Then you do not know'—
He murmured.

'Yes, I know,' I said, 'I know.
I had the news from Vincent Carring-
ton.

And yet I did not think you'd leave the
work

In England, for so much even,—though
of course

You'll make a work-day of your holiday,
And turn it to our Tuscan people's use,—
Who much need helping since the Aus-
trian boar

(So bold to cross the Alp to Lombardy
And dash his brute front unabashed
against

The steep snow-bosses of that shield of
God

Who soon shall rise in wrath and shake
it clear,)

Came hither also,—raking up our grape
And olive-gardens with his tyrannous
tusk,

And rolling on our maize with all his
swine.'

'You had the news from Vincent Car-
rington,'

He echoed,—picking up the phrase be-
yond,

As if he knew the rest was merely talk
To fill a gap and keep out a strong wind,
'You had, then, Vincent's personal
news?'

'His own,'
I answered. 'All that ruined world of
yours

Seems crumbling into marriage. Car-
rington

Has chosen wisely.'

'Do *you* take it so?'
He cried, 'and is it possible at last' . .
He paused there,—and then, inward to
himself,

'Too much at last, too late!—yet cer-
tainly' . .

(And there his voice swayed as an Al-
pine plank

That feels a passionate torrent under-
neath)

'The knowledge, had I known it first or
last,

Had never changed the actual case for
me.

And best for *her* at this time.'

Nay, I thought,
He loves Kate Ward, it seems, now, like
a man,

Because he has married Lady Walde-
mar.

Ah, Vincent's letter said how Leigh was
moved

To hear that Vincent was betrothed to
Kate.

With what cracked pitchers go we to
deep wells

In this world! Then I spoke,—'I did
not think,

My cousin, you had ever known Kate
Ward.'

'In fact I never knew her. 'Tis enough
That Vincent did, and therefore chose
his wife

For other reasons than those topaz eyes
I've heard of. Not to undervalue them,
For all that. One takes up the world
with eyes.

—Including Romney Leigh, I thought
again,
Albeit he knows them only by repute.

How vile must all men be, since *he's* a man.

His deep pathetic voice, as if he guessed I did not surely love him, took the word; 'You never got a letter from Lord Howe A month back, dear Aurora?'

'None,' I said.

'I felt it so,' he replied: 'Yet, strange! Sir Blaise Delorme has passed through Florence?'

By chance I saw him in Our Lady's church,

(I saw him, mark you, but he saw not me)

Clean-washed in holy water from the count

Of things terrestrial,—letters and the rest;

He had crossed us out together with his sins.

Ay, strange; but only strange that good Lord Howe

Preferred him to the post because of pauls.

For me I'm sworn never to trust a man—At least with letters.'

There were facts to tell,
To smooth with eye and accent. Howe supposed . .

Well, well, no matter! there was dubious need;

You heard the news from Vincent Car-
rington.

And yet perhaps you had been startled
less

To see me, dear Aurora, if you had
read

That letter.'

—Now he sets me down as vexed.
I think I've draped myself in woman's
pride

To a perfect purpose. Oh, I'm vexed,
it seems!

My friend Lord Howe deposes his friend
Sir Blaise

To break as softly as a sparrow's egg
That lets a bird out tenderly, the news

Of Romney's marriage to a certain saint;
To *smooth with eye and accent*,—indic-
cate

His possible presence. Excellently well
You've played your part, my Lady
Waldemar,—

As I've played mine.

'Dear Romney,' I began,
'You did not use, of old, to be so like

A Greek king coming from a taken Troy,
'I was needful that precursors spread
your path

With three-piled carpets, to receive your
foot

And dull the sound of't. For myself, be
sure,

Although it frankly grinds the gravel
here,

I still can bear it. Yet I'm sorry too
To lose this famous letter, which Sir

Blaise
Has twisted to a lighter absently

To fire some holy taper: dear Lord
Howe

Writes letters good for all things but to
lose;

And many a flower of London gossipry
Has dropt wherever such a stem broke

off.
Of course I feel that, lonely among my

vines,
Where nothing's talked of, save the
blight again—

And no more Chianti! Still the letter's
use

As preparation Did I start indeed?
Last night I started at a cockchafer,

And shook a half-hour after. Have you
learnt

No more of woman, 'spite of privilege,
Than still to take account too seriously

Of such weak flutterings? Why, we
like it, sir,

We get our powers and our effects that
way

The trees stand stiff and still at time of
frost,

If no wind tears them; but, let summer
come,

When trees are happy,—and a breath
avails

To set them trembling through a million
leaves

In luxury of emotion. Something less
It takes to move a woman: let her start

And shake at pleasure,—nor conclude at
yours,

'The winter's bitter,—but the summer's green.'

He answered, 'Be the summer ever green

With you, Aurora!—though you sweep your sex

With somewhat bitter gusts from where you live

Above them, whirling downward from your heights

Your very own pine-cones, in a grand disdain

Of the lowland burrs with which you scatter them.

So high and cold to others and yourself, A little less to Romney were unjust,

And thus, I would not have you. Let it pass :

I feel content so. You can bear indeed My sudden step beside you : but for me,

'Twould move me sore to hear your softened voice,—

Aurora's voice,—if softened unaware In pity of what I am.'

Ah friend, I thought, As husband of the Lady Waldemar

You're granted very sorely pitiable ! And yet Aurora Leigh must guard her voice

From softening in the pity of your case, As if from lie or license. Certainly

We'll soak up all the slush and soil of life With softened voices, ere we come to

you.

At which I interrupted my own thought And spoke out calmly. 'Let us ponder,

friend, What'er our state we must have made it first ;

And though the thing displease us, ay, perhaps

Displease us warrantably, never doubt That other states, though possible once,

and then Rejected by the instinct of our lives,

If then adopted had displeased us more Than this in which the choice, the will,

the love, Has stamped the honour of a patent act

From henceforth. What we choose may not be good ;

But, that we choose it, proves it good for ^{us}

Potentially, fantastically, now Or last year, rather than a thing we saw,

And saw no need for choosing. Moths will burn

Their wings,—which proves that light is good for moths,

Or else they had flown not where they agonise.'

'Ay, light is good,' he echoed, and there paused.

And then abruptly, . . 'Marian. Marian's well ?'

I bowed my head but found no word. 'Twas hard

To speak of *her* to Lady Waldemar's New husband. How much did he know,

at last ? How much ? how little ?——He would take no sign,

But straight repeated,—'Marian. Is she well ?'

'She's well,' I answered.

She was there in sight An hour back, but the night had drawn

her home ; Where still I heard her in an upper room,

Her low voice singing to the child in bed,

Who, restless with the summer-heat and play

And slumber snatched at noon, was long sometimes

At falling off, and took a score of songs

And mother-hushes ere she saw him sound.

'She's well,' I answered.

'Here ?' he asked.

'Yes, here.'

He stopped and sighed. 'That shall be presently.

But now this must be. I have words to say,

And would be alone to say them, I with you,

And no third troubling.'

'Speak then,' I returned,
'She will not vex you.'

At which, suddenly
He turned his face upon me with its
smile,
As if to crush me. 'I have read your
book,
Aurora.'

'You have read it,' I replied,
'And I have writ it,—we have done
with it.
And now the rest?'

'The rest is like the first,
He answered,—'for the book is in my
heart,
Lives in me, wakes in me, and dreams
in me:
My daily bread tastes of it,—and my
wine
Which has no smack of it, I pour it out;
It seems unnatural drinking.'

Bitterly
I took the word up; 'Never waste your
wine.

The book lived in me ere it lived in you;
I know it closer than another does,
And how it's foolish, feeble, and afraid,
And all unworthy so much compliment.
Beseech you, keep your wine,—and,
when you drink,

Still wish some happier fortune to a
friend,
Than even to have written a far better
book.'

He answered gently, 'That is consequent:

'The poet looks beyond the book he has
made/

Or else he had not made it. If a man
Could make a man, he'd henceforth be
a god

In judging what a little thing is man:
It is not my case. And this special book,
I did not make it, to make light of it:
It stands above my knowledge, draws
me up;

'Tis high to me. It may be that the book
Is not so high, but I so low, instead;
Still high to me. I mean no compliment:
I will not say there are not, young or old,
Male writers, ay or female,—let it pass,

Who'll write us richer and completer
books.

A man may love a woman perfectly,
And yet by no means ignorantly maintain

A thousand women have not larger eyes:
Enough that she alone has looked at him
With eyes that, large or small, have won
his soul.

And so, this book, Aurora,—so, your
book.'

'Alas,' I answered, 'is it so, indeed?'
And then was silent.

'Is it so, indeed,'
He echoed, 'that *alas* is all your word?'

I said,—'I'm thinking of a far-off June,
When you and I, upon my birthday
once,

Discours'd of life and art, with both
untried.

I'm thinking, Romney, how 'twas morning
then,
And now 'tis night.'

'And now,' he said, 'tis night.'

'I'm thinking,' I resumed, 'tis somewhat
sad

That if I had known, that morning in
the dew,

My cousin Romney would have said
such words

On such a night at close of many years,
In speaking of a future book of mine,
It would have pleased me better as a
hope,

Than as an actual grace it can at all.
'That's sad, I'm thinking.'

'Ay,' he said, 'tis night.'

'And there,' I added lightly, 'are the
stars!

And here we'll talk of stars and not of
books.'

'You have the stars,' he murmured,—
'it is well:

Be like them! shine, Aurora, on my
dark

Though high and cold and only like a
star,

And for this short night only,—you,
who keep

The same Aurora of the bright June day
 That withered up the flowers before my face,
 And turned me from the garden evermore
 Because I was not worthy. Oh, deserved,
 Deserved! That I, who verily had not learnt
 God's lesson half, attaining as a dunce
 To obliterate good works with fractious thumbs
 And cheat myself of the context,—I should push
 Aside, with male ferocious impudence.
 The world's Aurora, who had conned her part
 On the other side the leaf! Ignore her so,
 Because she was a woman and a queen,
 And had no beard to bristle through her song,
 My teacher, who has taught me with a book,
 My Miriam, whose sweet mouth, when nearly drowned
 I still heard singing on the shore! Deserved,
 That here I should look up unto the stars
 And miss the glory' . .

‘Can I understand?’

I broke in. ‘You speak wildly, Romney Leigh,
 Or I hear wildly. In that morning-time
 We recollect, the roses were too red,
 The trees too green, reproach too natural
 If one should see not what the other saw;
 And now, it's night, remember; we have shades
 In place of colours; we are now grown cold,
 And old, my cousin Romney. Pardon me,—
 I'm very happy that you like my book,
 And very sorry that I quoted back
 A ten years' birthday; 'twas so mad a thing
 In any woman, I scarce marvel much

You took it for a venturous piece of spite,
 Provoking such excuses as indeed
 I cannot call you slack in.’

‘Understand,’

He answered sadly, ‘something, if but so.

This night is softer than an English day,
 And men may well come hither when they're sick,

To draw in easier breath from larger air.
 'Tis thus with me; I've come to you,—to you,

My Italy of women, just to breathe
 My soul out once before you, ere I go,
 As humble as God makes me at the last
 (I thank Him) quite out of the way of men

And yours, Aurora,—like a punished child,

His cheeks all blurred with tears and naughtiness,

To silence in a corner. I am come

To speak, beloved’ . .

‘Wisely, cousin Leigh,

And worthily of us both!’

‘Yes, worthily;

For this time I must speak out and confess

That I, so truculent in assumption once,
 So absolute in dogma, proud in aim,
 And fierce in expectation,—I, who felt
 The whole world tugging at my skirts for help,

As if no other man than I, could pull,
 Nor woman, but I led her by the hand,
 Nor cloth hold, but I had it in my coat,
 Do know myself to-night for what I was
 On that June-day, Aurora. Poor bright day,

Which meant the best . . a woman and a rose,

And which I smote upon the cheek with words

Until it turned and rent me! Young you were,

That birthday, poet, but you talked the right:

While I . . I built up follies like a wall
 To intercept the sunshine and your face.
 Your face! that's worse.’

Speak wisely, cousin Leigh.’

‘Yes, wisely, dear Aurora, though too late:

But then, not wisely. I was heavy then,
And stupid, and distracted with the cries
Of tortured prisoners in the polished
brass

Of that Phalarian bull, society,
Which seems to bellow bravely like ten
bulls,

But, if you listen, moans and cries in-
stead

Despairingly, like victims tossed and
gored

And trampled by their hoofs. I heard
the cries

Too close : I could not hear the angels
lift

A fold of rustling air, nor what they said
To help my pity. I beheld the world
As one great famishing carnivorous
mouth,—

A huge, deserted, callow, blind, bird
Thing,

With piteous open beak that hurt my
heart,

Till down upon the filthy ground I drop-
ped,

And tore the violets up to get the worms.
Worms, worms, was all my cry : an
open mouth,

A gross want, bread to fill it to the lips,
No more ! That poor men narrowed
their demands

To such an end, was virtue, I supposed,
Adjudicating that to see it so

Was reason. Oh, I did not push the case
Up higher, and ponder how it answers
when

The rich take up the same cry for them-
selves,

Professing equally,—‘an open mouth
A gross need, food to fill us, and no
more.’

Why that’s so far from virtue, only vice
Can find excuse for’t ! That makes
libertines :

And slurs our cruel streets from end to
end

With eighty thousand women in one
smile,

Who only smile at night beneath the
gas :

The body’s satisfaction and no more,
Is used for argument against the soul’s,
Here too ; the want, here too, implies
the right.

—How dark I stood that morning in the
sun.

My best Aurora, though I saw your eyes,
When first you told me . . oh, I recollect
The sounds, and how you lifted your
small hand,

And how your white dress and your
burnished curls

Went greating round you in the still
blue air,

As if an inspiration from within
Had blown them all out when you spoke
the words,

Even these,—‘ You will not compass
your poor ends

‘ Of barley-feeding and material ease,
‘ Without the poet’s individualism

‘ To work your universal. It takes a soul,
‘ To move a body,—it takes a high-
souled man,

‘ To move the masses . . even to a clean-
er style :

‘ It takes the ideal, to blow an inch in-
side

‘ The dust of the actual : and your
Fouriers failed,

‘ Because not poets enough to under-
stand

‘ That life develops from within.’ I say
Your words,—I could say other words of
yours ;

For none of all your words will let me
go ;

Like sweet verbena which, being brushed
against,

Will hold us three hours after by the
smell

In spite of long walks upon windy hills,
But these words dealt in sharper per-
fume,—these

Were ever on me, stinging through my
dreams,

And saying themselves for ever o’er my
acts

Like some unhappy verdict. That I
failed,

Is certain. Style or no style, to con-
trive

The swine’s propulsion toward the pre-
cipice,

Proved easy and plain. I subtly organ-
ised

And ordered, built the cards up high
and higher,

Fill, some one breathing, all fell flat again !

In setting right society's wide wrong,
Mere life 's so fatal ! So I failed indeed
Once, twice, and oftener, — hearing
through the rents

Of obstinate purpose, still those words of
yours,

*' You will not compass your poor ends,
not you !'*

But harder than you said them ; every
time

Still farther from your voice, until they
came

To overcrow me with triumphant scorn
Which vexed me to resistance. Set down
this

For condemnation,—I was guilty here :
I stood upon my deed and fought my
doubt,

As men will,—for I doubted,—till at last
My deed gave way beneath me suddenly
And left me what I am. The curtain
dropped,

My part quite ended, all the footlights
quenched,

My own soul hissing at me through the
dark,

I, ready for confession,—I was wrong,
I've sorely failed, I've slipped the ends
of life,

I yield, you have conquered.'

' Stay,' I answered him ;
' I've something for your hearing, also. I
Have failed too.'

' You !' he said, ' you're very great ;
The sadness of your greatness fits you
well :

As if the plume upon a hero's casque
Should nod a shadow upon his victor
face.'

I took him up austere, — ' You have
read

My book, but not my heart ; for recol-
lect,

'Tis writ in Sanscrit which you bungle
at.

I've surely failed, I know, if failure
means

To look back sadly on work gladly
done,—

To wander on my mountains of Delight,
So called, (I can remember a friend's
words

As well as you, sir,) weary and in want
Of even a sheep-path, thinking bitterly. .
Well, well ! no matter. I but say so
much,

To keep you, Romney Leigh, from say-
ing more,

And let you feel I am not so high in-
deed,

That I can bear to have you at my
foot,—

Or safe, that I can help you. That June-
day,

Too deeply sunk in craterous sunsets
now

For you or me to dig it up alive ;
To pluck it out all bleeding with spent
flame

At the roots, before those moralising
stars

We have got instead,—that poor lost
day, you said

Some words as truthful as the thing of
mine

You cared to keep in memory : and I
hold

If I, that day, and, being the girl I was,
Had shown a gentler spirit, less arro-
gance,

It had not hurt me. You will scarce
mistake

The point here. I but only think, you
see,

More justly, that's more humbly, of my-
self,

Than when I tried a crown on and
supposed . . .

Nay, laugh sir,—I'll laugh with you !—
pray you, laugh.

I've had so many birthdays since that
day,

I've learnt to prize mirth's opportuni-
ties,

Which come too seldom. Was it you
who said

I was not changed ? the same Aurora ?
Ah,

We could laugh there, too ! Why,
Ulysses' dog

Knew *him*, and wagged his tail and
died : but if

I had owned a dog, I too, before my
Troy,

And, if you brought him here, . . I war-
rant you

He'd look into my face, bark lustily,
And live on stoutly, as the creatures will
Whose spirits are not troubled by long
loves.

A dog would never know me, I'm so
changed,
Much less a friend . . except you're mis-
led

By the colour of the hair, the trick of
the voice,

Like that Aurora Leigh's.'

'Sweet trick of voice!

I would be a dog for this, to know it at
last,

And die upon the falls of it. O love,
O best Aurora! are you then so sad,
You scarcely had been sadder as my
wife?'

'Your wife, sir! I must certainly be
changed

If I, Aurora, can have said a thing
So light, it catches at the knightly spurs
Of a noble gentleman like Romney
Leigh,

And trips him from his honourable sense
Of what befits' . .

'You wholly misconceive,'

He answered

I returned,—'I'm glad of it :
But keep from misconception, too, your-
self :

I am not humbled to so low a point,
Nor so far saddened. If I am sad at
all,

Ten layers of birthdays on a woman's
head

Are apt to fossilise her girlish mirth,
Though ne'er so merry : I am perforce
more wise

And that, in truth, means sadder. For
the rest,

Look here, sir : I was right upon the
whole

That birthday morning. 'Tis impossible
To get at men excepting through their
souls,

However open their carnivorous jaws :
And poets get directlier at the soul,

Than any of your æconomists :—for
which

You must not overlook the poet's work
When scheming for the world's necessi-
ties,

The soul's the way. Not even Christ
Himself

Can save man else than as He holds
man's soul ;

And therefore did He come into our
flesh,

As some wise hunter creeping on his
knees

With a torch, into the blackness of a
cave,

To face and quell the beast there,—take
the soul,

And so possess the whole man, body and
soul.

I said, so far, right, yes ; not farther,
though :

We both were wrong that June-day,—
both as wrong

As an east wind had been. I who talked
of art,

And you who grieved for all men's griefs
. . . what then ?

We surely made too small a part for God
In these things. What we are, imports
us more

Than what we eat ; and life, you've
granted me,

Develops from within But innermost
Of the inmost, most interior of the in-
terne,

God claims his own, Divine humanity
Renewing nature,—or the piercingest
verse,

Prest in by subtlest poet, still must keep
As much upon the outside of a man

As the very bowl in which he dips his
beard.

—And then, . . the rest ; I cannot surely
speak.

Perhaps I doubt more than you doubted
then,

If I, the poet's veritable charge,
Have borne upon my forehead. If I

have

It might feel somewhat liker to a crown,
The foolish green one even.—Ah, I think,

And chiefly when the sun shines, that
I've failed.

But what then, Romney ? Though we
fail indeed,

You . . I . . a score of such weak work-
ers, . . He

fails never. If He cannot work by us,

He will work over us. Does He want
a man,
Much less a woman, think you? Every
time
The star winks there, so many souls are
born,
Who all shall work too. Let our own
be calm :
We should be ashamed to sit beneath
those stars,
Impatient that we're nothing.

‘ Could we sit
Just so for ever, sweetest friend,’ he said,
‘ My failure would seem better than suc-
cess.
And yet indeed your book has dealt
with me
More gently, cousin, than you ever will !
The book brought down entire the
bright June-day,
And set me wandering in the garden-
walks,
And let me watch the garland in a place,
You blushed so . . nay, forgive me ; do
not stir :
I only thank the book for what it taught,
And what, permitted. Poet, doubt your-
self,
But never doubt that you're a poet to
me
From henceforth. You have written
poems, sweet,
Which moved me in secret, as the sap
is moved
In still March-branches, signless as a
stone :
But this last book o'ercame me like soft
rain
Which falls at midnight, when the
tightened bark
Breaks out into unhesitating buds
And sudden protestations of the spring.
In all your other books, I saw but *you* :
A man may see the moon so, in a pond,
And not the nearer therefore to the
moon,
Nor use the sight . . except to drown
himself.
And so I forced my heart back from the
sight,
For what had I, I thought, to do with *her*,
Aurora . . Romney ? But, in this last
book,

You showed me something separate from
yourself,
Beyond you, and I bore to take it in,
And let it draw me You have shown
me truths,
O June-day friend, that help me now at
night
When June is over ! truths not yours,
indeed,
But set within my reach by means of
you,
Presented by your voice and verse the
way
To take them clearest. Verily I was
wrong ;
And verily many thinkers of this age,
Ay, many Christian teachers, half in
heaven,
Are wrong in just my sense who under-
stood
Our natural world too insularly, as if
No spiritual counterpart completed it
Consummating its meaning, rounding
all
To justice and perfection, line by line,
Form by form, nothing single nor alone,
The great below clenched by the great
above,
Shade here authenticating substance
there,
The body proving spirit, as the effect
The cause : we meantime being too
grossly apt
To hold the natural, as dogs a bone,
(Though reason and nature beat us in
the face)
So obstinately, that we'll break our
teeth
Or ever we let go. For everywhere
We're too materialistic,—eating clay
(Like men of the west) instead of
Adam's corn
And Noah's wine ; clay by handfuls,
clay by lumps,
Until we're filled up to the throat with
clay,
And grow the grimy colour of the
ground
On which we are feeding, Ay, materi-
alist
The age's name is. God himself, with
some,
Is apprehended as the bare result
Of what his hand materialy has made,

Expressed in such an algebraic sign
 Called God ;—that is, to put it other-
 wise,
 They add up nature to a naught of God
 And cross the quotient. There are
 many even
 Whose names are written in the Chris-
 tian church
 To no dishonour,—diet still on mud,
 And splash the altars with it. You
 might think
 The clay, Christ laid upon their eyelids
 when,
 Still blind, he called them to the use of
 sight,
 Remained there to retard its exercise
 With clogging incrustations. Close to
 heaven,
 They see, for mysteries, through the
 open doors,
 Vague puffs of smoke from pots of
 earthenware ;
 And fain would enter, when their time
 shall come,
 With quite another body than St Paul
 Has promised,—husk and chaff, the
 whole barley corn,
 Or where's the resurrection ?'
 'Thus it is,'
 I sighed. And he resumed with mourn-
 ful face.
 'Beginning so, and filling up with clay
 The wards of this great key, the natural
 world,
 And fumbling vainly therefore at the
 lock
 Of the spiritual,—we feel ourselves shut
 in
 With all the wild-beast roar of struggling
 life,
 The terrors and compunctions of our
 souls,
 As saints with lions,—we who are not
 saints,
 And have no heavenly lordship in our
 stare
 To awe them backward ! Ay, we are
 forced, so pent,
 To judge the whole too partially, . .
 confound
 Conclusions. Is there any common
 phrase
 Significant, with the adverb heard
 alone,

The verb being absent, and the pronoun
 out ?
 But we, distracted in the roar of life
 Still insolently at God's adverb snatch,
 And bruit against Him that his thought
 is void,
 His meaning hopeless,—cry, that every-
 where
 The government is slipping from his
 hand,
 Unless some other Christ..say Romney
 Leigh..
 Come up and toil and moil, and change
 the world,
 Because the First has proved inadequate,
 However we talk bigly of His work
 And piously of His person. We blas-
 pheme
 At last, to finish our doxology,
 Despairing on the earth for which He
 died.'
 'So now I asked, 'you have more hope
 of men ?'
 'I hope,' he answered : 'I am come to
 think
 That God will have his work done, as
 you said,
 And that we need not be disturbed too
 much
 For Romney Leigh or others having
 failed
 With this or that quack nostrum,—
 recipes
 For keeping summits by annulling
 depths,
 For wrestling with luxurious lounging
 sleeves,
 And acting heroism without a scratch.
 We fail,—what, then ? Aurora, if I
 smiled
 To see you, in your lovely morning-
 pride,
 Try on the poet's wreath which suits
 the noon,
 (Sweet cousin, walls must get the
 weather-stain
 Before they grow the ivy !)—certainly
 I stood myself there worthier of con-
 tempt,
 Self-rated, in disastrous arrogance,
 As competent to sorrow for mankind
 And even their odds. A man may well
 despair,

Who counts himself so needful to success.

I failed. I throw the remedy back on God,

And sit down here beside you in good hope.'

'And yet, take heed,' I answered, 'lest we lean

Too dangerously on the other side,
And so fail twice. Be sure, no earnest work

Of any honest creature, howbeit weak,
Imperfect, ill-adapted, fails so much,
It is not gathered as a grain of sand
To enlarge the sum of human action used
For carrying out God's end. No creature works

So ill, observe, that therefore he's cashiered.

The honest earnest man must stand and work,

The woman also; otherwise she drops
At once below the dignity of man,
Accepting serfdom. Free men freely work.

Whoever fears God, fears to sit at ease.'

He cried, 'True. After Adam, work was curse;

The natural creature labours, sweats and frets.

But after Christ, work turns to privilege,
And henceforth one with our humanity,
The Six-day Worker, working still in us,
Has called us freely to work on with Him

In high companionship. So, happiest!
I count that Heaven itself is only work
To a surer issue. Let us work, indeed,
But no more work as Adam . . . nor as Leigh

Erewhile, as if the only man on earth,
Responsible for all the thistles blown
And tigers couchant,—struggling in amaze

Against disease and winter,—snarling on
For ever, that the world's not paradise,
Oh cousin, let us be content, in work,
To do the thing we can, and not presume
To fret because it's little. 'Twill employ
Seven men, they say, to make a perfect pin:

Who makes the head, content to miss the point,

Who makes the point, agreed to leave the join:

And if a man should cry, 'I want a pin,
'And I must make it straightway, head and point,'

His wisdom is not worth the pin he wants.

Seven men to a pin,—and not a man too much!

Seven generations, haply, to this world,
To right it visibly a finger's breadth,
And mend its rents a little. Oh, to storm
And say, 'This world here is intolerable;
'I will not eat this corn, nor drink this wine,

'Nor love this woman, flinging her soul
'Without a bond for 't as a lover should,
'Nor use the generous leave of happiness
'As not too good for using generously'—
(Since virtue kindles at the touch of joy,
Like a man's cheek laid on a woman's hand,

And God, who knows it, looks for quick returns

From joys)——to stand and claim to have a life

Beyond the bounds of the individual man,

And raze all personal cloisters of the soul

To build up public stores and magazines,
As if God's creatures otherwise were lost,
The builder surely saved by any means!
To think,—I have a pattern on my nail,
And I will carve the world new after it,
And solve so, these hard social questions,—nay,

Impossible social questions,—since their roots

Strike deep in Evil's own existence here,
Which God permits because the question's hard

To abolish evil nor attain free-will.

Ay, hard to God, but not to Romney Leigh!

For Romney has a pattern on his nail,
(Whatever may be lacking on the Mount)
And not being overnice to separate
What's element from what's convention, hastes

By line on line to draw you out a world,
Without your help indeed, unless you take

His yoke upon you and will learn of him,

So much he has to teach ! so good a world !

The same, the whole creation's groaning for !

No rich nor poor, no gain nor loss nor stint,

No potage in it able to exclude

A brother's birthright, and no right of birth,

The potage—both secured to every man,
And perfect virtue dealt out like the rest

Gratuitously, with the soup at six,
To whoso does not seek it.'

'Softly, sir,'

I interrupted,—'I had a cousin once
I held in reverence. If he strained too wide.

It was not to take honour but to give help ;

The gesture was heroic. If his hand
Accomplished nothing . . (well, it is not proved)

That empty hand thrown impotently out
Were sooner caught, I think, by One in heaven,

Than many a hand that reaped a harvest in

And keeps the scythe's glow on it.
Pray you, then,

For my sake merely, use less bitterness
In speaking of my cousin.'

'Ah,' he said,

'Aurora ! when the prophet beats the ass,

The angel intercedes.' He shook his head—

'And yet to mean so well and fail so foul,

Expresses ne'er another beast than man ;
The antithesis is human. Harken, dear ;
There's too much abstract willing, purposing.

In this poor world. We talk by aggregates,

And think by systems ; and, being used to face

Our evils in statistics, are inclined

To cap them with unreal remedies

Drawn out in haste on the other side the slate.'

'That's true,' I answered, fain to throw up thought,

And make a game of't,—yes, we generalise

Enough to please you. If we pray at all,
We pray no longer for our daily bread,
But next centenary's harvests. If we give,

Our cup of water is not tendered till
We lay down pipes and found a Company

With Branches. Ass or angel, 'tis the same :

A woman cannot do the thing she ought,
Which means whatever perfect thing she can,

In life, in art, in science, but she fears
To let the perfect action take her part
And rest there : she must prove what she can do

Before she does it,—prate of woman's rights,

Of woman's mission, woman's function, till

The men (who are prating too on their side) cry,

'A woman's function plainly is . . to talk.'

Poor souls, they are very reasonably vexed ;

They cannot hear each other speak.'

'And you,

An artist, judge so ?'

'I, an artist,—yes,

Because, precisely, I'm an artist, sir,
And woman,—if another sate in sight,
I'd whisper,—Soft, my sister ! not a word !

By speaking we prove only we can speak :
Which he, the man here, never doubted.

What

He doubts is whether we can *do* the thing

With decent grace we've not yet done at all.

Now, do it ; bring your statue,—you have room !

He'll see it even by the starlight here ;
And if 'tis e'er so little like the god

Who looks out from the marble silently
Along the track of his own shining dart

Through the dusk of ages,—there's no need to speak ;

The universe shall henceforth speak for you'

And witness, 'She who did this thing,
 was born
 To do it,—claims her license in her
 work.'
 —And so with more works. Who cures
 the plague,
 Though twice a woman, shall be called
 a leech :
 Who rights a land's finances, is excused
 for touching coppers, though her hands
 be white,—
 But we, we talk !'
 'It is the age's mood,'
 He said ; ' we boast, and do not. We
 put up
 Hostelry signs where'er we lodge a day,
 Some red colossal cow with mighty
 paps
 A Cyclops' fingers could not strain to
 milk ;
 Then bring out presently our saucer-full
 Of curds. We want more quiet in our
 works,
 More knowledge of the bounds in which
 we work ;
 More knowledge that each individual
 man
 Remains an Adam to the general race,
 Constrained to see, like Adam, that he
 keep
 His personal state's condition honestly,
 Or vain all thoughts of his to help the
 world,
 Which still must be developed from its
one
 If bettered in its many. We indeed,
 Who think to lay it out new like a park,
 We take a work on us which is not
 man's,
 For God alone sits far enough above
 To speculate so largely. None of us
 (Not Romney Leigh) is mad enough to
 say,
 We'll have a grove of oaks upon that
 slope
 And sink the need of acorns. Govern-
 ment,
 If veritable and lawful, is not given
 By imposition of the foreign hand,
 Nor chosen from a pretty pattern-book
 Of some domestic idealogue who sits
 And coldly chooses empire, where as
 well

He might republic. Genuine govern-
 ment
 Is but the expression of a nation, good
 Or less good,—even as all society,
 Howe'er unequal, monstrous, crazed,
 and cursed,
 Is but the expression of men's single
 lives,
 The loud sum of the silent units. What,
 We'd change the aggregate and yet
 retain
 Each separate figure ? Whom do we
 cheat by that ?
 Now, not even Romney.'
 'Cousin, you are sad.
 Did all your social labor at Leigh Hall
 And elsewhere, come to nought then ?'
 'It was nought,'
 He answered mildly. 'There is room
 indeed
 For statues still, in this large world of
 God's,
 But not for vacuums,—so I am not sad :
 Not sadder than is good for what I am.
 My vain phalanstery dissolved itself ;
 My men and women of disordered lives,
 I brought in orderly to dine and sleep,
 Broke up those waxen masks I made
 them to wear,
 With fierce contortions of the natural
 face ;
 And cursed me for my tyrannous con-
 straint
 In forcing crooked creatures to live
 straight ;
 And set the country hounds upon my
 back
 To bite and tear me for my wicked
 deed
 Of trying to do good without the church
 Or even the squires, Aurora. Do you
 mind
 Your ancient neighbours ? The great
 book-club teems
 With 'sketches,' 'summaries,' and 'last
 tracts' but twelve,
 On socialistic troublers of close bonds
 Betwixt the generous rich and grateful
 poor.
 The vicar preached from 'Revelations,'
 (till
 The doctor woke) and found me with
 'the frogs'

On three successive Sundays ; ay, and
stopped

To weep a little (for he's getting old)
'That such perdition should o'ertake a
man

Of such fair acres,—in the parish, too !
He printed his discourses 'by request,'
And if your book shall sell as his did,
then

Your verses are less good than I sup-
pose.

The women of the neighbourhood sub-
scribed,

And sent me a copy bound in scarlet silk,
Tooled edges, blazoned with the arms of
Leigh :

I own that touched me.'

'What, the pretty ones ?

Poor Romney !'

'Otherwise the effect was small.

I had my windows broken once or twice
By liberal peasants naturally incensed
At such a vexer of Arcadian peace,
Who would not let men call their wives
their own

To lack like Britons, and made ob-
stacles

When things went smoothly as a baby
drugged,

Toward freedom and starvation ; bring-
ing down

The wicked London tavern-thieves and
drabs

To affront the blessed hillside drabs and
thieves

With mended morals, quotha, — fine
new lives !—

My windows paid for't. I was shot at,
once,

By an active poacher who had hit a
hare

From the other barrel, (tired of springe-
ing game

So long upon my acres, undisturbed,
And restless for the country's virtue,—
yet

He missed me)—ay, and pelted very oft
In riding through the village. 'There
he goes

'Who'd drive away our Christian gen-
tlefolks,

'To catch us undefended in the trap

'He baits with poisonous cheese, and
lock us up

'In that pernicious prison of Leigh Hall
'With all his murderers ! Give another
name

'And say Leigh Hell, and burn it up
with fire.'

And so they did at last, Aurora.'

'Did ?'

'You never heard it, cousin ? Vincent's
news

Came stinted, then.'

'They did ? they burnt Leigh Hall ?

'You're sorry, dear Aurora ? Yes
indeed,

They did it perfectly : a thorough
work,

And not a failure, this time. Let us
grant

'Tis somewhat easier, though, to burn a
house

Than build a system :—yet that's easy,
too,

In a dream. Books, pictures,—ay, the
pictures ! what,

You think your dear Vandykes would
give them pause ?

Our proud ancestral Leighs with those
peaked beards,

Or bosoms white as foam thrown up on
rocks

From the old-spent wave. Such calm
defiant looks

They flared up with ! now nevermore
to twit

The bones in the family-vault with ugly
death.

Not one was rescued, save the Lady
Maud,

Who threw you down, that morning you
were born,

The undeniable lineal mouth and chin
To wear for ever for her gracious sake ;

For which good deed I saved her : the
rest went :

And you, you're sorry, cousin. Well,
for me,

With all my phalansterians safely out,
(Poor hearts, they helped the burners,

it was said,
And certainly a few clapped hands and

yelled)

The ruin did not hurt me as it might,—
As when for instance I was hurt one day

A certain letter being destroyed. In fact,
 To see the great house flare so . . oaken floors,
 Our fathers made so fine with rushes once
 Before our mothers furbished them with trains,
 Carved wainscoats, panelled walls, the favourite slide
 For draining off a martyr, (or a rogue)
 The echoing galleries, half a half-mile long,
 And all the various stairs that took you up
 And took you down, and took you round about
 Upon their slippery darkness, recollect,
 All helping to keep up one blazing jest ;
 The flames through all the casements pushing forth
 Like red-hot devils crinkled into snakes,
 All signifying,—‘Look you, Romney Leigh,
 ‘We save the people from your saving, here,
 ‘Yet so as by fire! we make a pretty show
 ‘Besides,—and that’s the best you’ve ever done.’

—To see this, almost moved myself to clap!
 The ‘vale et plaude’ came too with effect
 When, in the roof fell, and the fire that paused,
 Stunned momentarily beneath the stroke of slates
 And tumbling rafters, rose at once and roared,
 And wrapping the whole house, (which disappeared
 In a mounting whirlwind of dilated flame,)
 Blew upward, straight, its drift of fiery chaff
 In the face of heaven, . . which blenched,
 ed, and ran up higher.’

‘Poor Romney!’
 ‘Sometimes when I dream,’ he said,
 ‘I hear the silence after, ’twas so still.

For all those wild beasts, yelling, cursing round,
 Were suddenly silent, while you counted five,
 So silent, that you heard a young bird fall
 From the top-nest in the neighbouring rookery,
 Through edging over-rashly toward the light.
 The old rooks had already fled too far,
 To hear the screech they fled with, though you saw
 Some flying still, like scatterings of dead leaves
 In autumn-gusts, seen dark against the sky :
 All flying,—ousted, like the house of Leigh.

Dear Romney !

‘Evidently ’twould have been
 A fine sight for a poet, sweet, like you,
 To make the verse blaze after. I myself,
 Even I, felt something in the grand old trees,
 Which stood that moment like brute Druid gods
 Amazed upon the rim of ruin, where,
 As into a blackened socket, the great fire
 Had dropped,—still throwing up splinters now and then
 To show them grey with all their centuries,
 Left there to witness that on such a day
 The House went out.’

‘Ah !’

‘While you counted five
 I seemed to feel a little like a Leigh,—
 But then it passed, Aurora. A child cried,
 And I had enough to think of what to do
 With all those houseless wretches in the dark,
 And ponder where they’d dance the next time, they
 Who had burnt the viol.’

‘Did you think of that ?
 Who burns his viol will not dance, I know,
 To cymbals, Romney.’
 ‘O my sweet sad voice,’

He cried,—‘O voice that speaks and
overcomes!
The sun is silent, but Aurora speaks.’

‘Alas,’ I said; ‘I speak I know not
what;
I’m back in childhood, thinking as a
child,
A foolish fancy—will it make you smile?
I shall not from the window of my room
Catch sight of those old chunnies any
more.

‘No more,’ he answered. ‘If you pushed
one day
Through all the green hills to our father’s
house,
You’d come upon a great charred circle
where
The patient earth was singed an acre
round;
With one stone-stair, symbolic of my
life,
Ascending, winding, leading up to
nought!
’Tis worth a poet’s seeing. Will you
go?’

I made no answer. Had I any right
To weep with this man, that I dared to
speak!
A woman stood between his soul and
mine,
And waved us off from touching ever-
more
With those unclean white hands of hers.
Enough.
We had burnt our viols and were silent.
So,
The silence lengthened till it pressed. I
spoke,
To breathe: ‘I think you were ill after-
ward.’

More ill,’ he answered, ‘had been
scarcely ill.
I hoped this feeble fumbling at life’s
knot
Might end concisely,—but I failed to
die,
As formerly I failed to live,—and thus
Grew willing, having tried all other
ways,

To try just God’s. Humility’s so good,
When pride’s impossible. Mark us,
how we make

Our virtues, cousin, from our worn-out
sins,

Which smack of them from henceforth.
Is it right,

For instance, to wed here while you
love there?

And yet because a man sins once, the
sin

Cleaves to him, in necessity to sin,
That if he sinned not *so*, to damn him-
self,

He sins *so*, to damn others with himself:
And thus to wed here, loving there, be-
comes

A duty. Virtue buds a dubious leaf
Round mortal brows; your ivy’s better,
dear.

—Yet she, ’tis certain, is my very wife,
The very lamb left mauled by the
wolves

Through my own bad shepherding; and
could I choose

But take her on my shoulder past this
stretch

Of rough, uneasy wilderness, poor lamb,
Poor child, poor child?—Aurora, my
beloved,

I will not vex you any more to-night,
But having spoken what I came to say,
The rest shall please you. What she
can in me,—

Protection, tender liking, freedom, ease,
She shall have surely, liberally, for her
And hers, Aurora. Small amends they’ll
make

For hideous evils which she had not
known

Except by me, and for this imminent
loss,

This forfeit presence of a gracious friend,
Which also she must forfeit for my sake,
Since, . . . drop your hand in mine a
moment, sweet,

We’re parting!—Ah, my snowdrop,
what a touch,

As if the wind had swept it off! you
grudge

Your gelid sweetness on my palm but
so,

A moment? angry, that I could not
bear

You . . speaking, breathing, living, side
by side
With some one called my wife . . and
live, myself?

Nay, be not cruel—you must under-
stand!

Your lightest footfall on a floor of mine
Would shake the house, my lintel being
uncrossed

'Gainst angels: henceforth it is night
with me,

And so, henceforth, I put the shutters
up:

Auroras must not come to spoil my
dark.'

He smiled so feebly, with an empty
hand

Stretched sideways from me,—as indeed
he looked

To any one but me to give him help,—
And while the moon came suddenly out
full,

The double rose of our Italian moons,
Sufficient plainly for the heaven and
earth,

(The stars, struck dumb and washed
away in dews

Of glory, and the mountains steeped
In divine languor) he the man, ap-
peared

So pale and patient, like the marble
man

A sculptor puts his personal sadness in
'To join his grandeur of ideal thought,—

As if his mallet struck me from my
height

Of passionate indignation, I who had
risen

Pale,—doubting, paused, . . . Was
Romney mad indeed?

Had all this wrong of heart made sick
the brain?

Then quiet, with a sort of tremulous
pride,

'Go, cousin,' I said coldly; 'a farewell
Was sooner spoken 'twixt a pair of
friends

In those old days, than seems to suit you
now.

Howbeit, since then, I've writ a book
or two,

I'm somewhat dull still in the manly art
Of phrase and metaphrase. Why, any
man

Can carve a score of white Loves out of
snow,

As Buonarroti in my Florence there,
And set them on the wall in some safe
shade,

As safe, sir, as your marriage! very
good:

Though if a woman took one from the
ledge

To put it on the table by her flowers,
And let it mind her of a certain friend,

'Twould drop at once, (so better,) would
not bear

Her nail-mark even, where she took it
up

A little tenderly; so best, I say:

For me, I would not touch the fragile
thing,

And risk to spoil it half an hour before
The sun shall shine to melt it: leave it
there.

I'm plain at speech, direct in purpose:
when

I speak, you'll take the meaning as it is,
And not allow for puckerings in the silk

By clever stitches. I'm a woman, sir,
And use the woman's figures naturally,

As you the male license. So, I wish
you well.

I'm simply sorry for the griefs you've
had

And not for your sake only, but man-
kind's.

This race is never grateful: from the
first,

One fills their cup at supper with pure
wine,

Which back they give at cross-time on
a sponge,

In vinegar and gall.'

'If gratefuller,'

He murmured,—'by so much less pitia-
ble!

God's self would never have come down
to die,

Could man have thanked him for it.'

'Happily

'Tis patent that, whatever,' I resumed,
'You suffered from this thanklessness

of men,

You sink no more than Moses' bulrush-
 boat
 When you once relieved of Moses ; for
 you're light,
 You're light, my cousin ! which is well
 for you,
 And manly. For myself,—now mark
 me, sir,
 They burnt Leigh Hall ; but if, con-
 summated
 To devils, heightened beyond Lucifers,
 They had burnt instead a star or two of
 those
 We saw above there just a moment
 back,
 Before the moon abolished them,—des-
 troyed
 And riddled them in ashes through a
 sieve
 On the head of the foundering uni-
 verse,—what then ?
 If you and I remained still you and I,
 It could not shift our places as mere
 friends,
 Nor render decent you should toss a
 phrase
 Beyond the point of actual feeling !—
 nay,
 You shall not interrupt me : as you said,
 We're parting. Certainly, not once or
 twice
 To-night you've mocked me somewhat,
 or yourself,
 And I, at least, have not deserved it so
 That I should meet it unsurprised. But
 now,
 Enough : we're parting . . parting.
 Cousin Leigh,
 I wish you well through all the acts of
 life
 And life's relations, wedlock not the
 least,
 And it shall ' please me,' in your words,
 to know
 You yield your wife, protection, free-
 dom, ease,
 And very tender liking. May you live
 So happy with her, Romney, that your
 friends
 May praise her for it. Meantime some
 of us
 Are wholly dull in keeping ignorant
 Of what she has suffered by you, and
 what debt

Of sorrow your rich love sits down to
 pay :
 But if 'tis sweet for love to pay its debt,
 'Tis sweeter still for love to give its gift,
 And you, be liberal in the sweeter way,
 You can, I think. At least, as touches
 me,
 You owe her, cousin Romney, no
 amends.
 She is not used to hold my gown so fast,
 You need entreat her now to let it go :
 The lady never was a friend of mine,
 Nor capable,—I thought you knew as
 much,—
 Of losing for your sake so poor a prize
 As such a worthless friendship. Be con-
 tent,
 Good cousin, therefore, both for her and
 you !
 I'll never spoil your dark, nor dull your
 noon,
 Nor vex you when you're merry, or at
 rest :
 You shall not need to put a shutter up
 To keep out this Aurora,—though your
 north
 Can make Auroras which vex nobody,
 Scarce known from night, I fancied ! let
 me add,
 My larks fly higher than some windows.
 Well,
 You've read your Leighs. Indeed
 'twould shake a house,
 If such as I came in with outstretched
 hand
 Still warm and thrilling from the clasp
 of one . .
 Of one we know, . . to acknowledge,
 palm to palm,
 As mistress there . . the Lady Walde-
 mar.'

' Now God be with us ' . . with a sudden
 clash
 Of voice he interrupted—' what name's
 that ?
 You spoke a name, Aurora.'
 ' Pardon me ;
 I would that, Romney, I could name
 your wife
 Nor wound you, yet be worthy.'
 ' Are we mad ?'
 He echoed—' wife ! mine ! Lady Walde-
 demar !

I think you said my wife.' He sprang
to his feet,
And threw his noble head back toward
the moon
As one who swims against a stormy sea,
And laughed with such a helpless, hope-
less scorn,
I stood and trembled.

'May God judge me so,'

He said at last,—'I came convicted
here,
And humbled sorely if not enough. I
came,
Because this woman from her crystal
soul

Had shown me something which a man
calls light :

Because too, formerly, I sinned by her
As then and ever since I have, by God,
Through arrogance of nature,—though I
loved . .

Whom best, I need not say, . . since that
is writ

Too plainly in the book of my misdeeds:
And thus I came here to abase myself,
And fasten, kneeling, on her regent
brows

A garland which I startled thence one
day

Of her beautiful June-youth. But here
again

I'm baffled!—fail in my abasement as
My aggrandisement: there's no room
left for me

At any woman's foot who misconceives
My nature, purpose, possible actions.
What!

Are you the Aurora who made large my
dreams

To frame your greatness? you conceive
so small?

You stand so less than woman, through
being more,

And lose your natural instinct, like a
beast,

Through intellectual culture? since in-
deed

I do not think that any common she
Would dare adopt such monstrous for-
geries

For the legible life-signature of such
As I, with all my blots: with all my
blots!

At last then, peerless cousin, we are
peers—

At last we're even. Ah, you've left
your height,

And here upon my level we take hands,
And here I reach you to forgive you,
sweet,

And that's a fall, Aurora. Long ago
You seldom understood me,—but before,
I could not blame you. Then, you only
seemed

So high above, you could not see be-
low;

But now I breathe,—but now I pardon!
—nay,

We're parting. Dearest, men have
burnt my house,

Maligned my motives,—but not one, I
swear,

Has wronged my soul as this Aurora has,
Who called the Lady Waldemar my
wife.

'Not married to her! yet you said' . .
'Again?

'Nay, read the lines' (he held a letter
out)

'She sent you through me.'

By the moonlight there,
I tore the meaning out with passionate
haste

Much rather than I read it. Thus it
ran.

NINTH BOOK.

EVEN thus. I pause to write it out at
length,
The letter of the Lady Waldemar.

'I prayed your cousin Leigh to take you
this,

He says he'll do it. After years of love,
Or what is called so,—when a woman
frets

And fools upon one string of a man's
name,

And fingers it for ever till it breaks,—
He may perhaps do for her such thing,

And she accept it without detriment
Although she should not love him any
more.

And I, who do not love him, nor love you,
 Nor you, Aurora,—choose you shall repent
 Your most ungracious letter and confess,
 Constrained by his convictions, (he's convinced)
 You've wronged me foully. Are you made so ill,
 You woman—to impute such ill to *me*?
 We both had mothers,—lay in their bosom once.
 And, after all, I thank you, Aurora Leigh,
 For proving to myself that there are things
 I would not do, . . . not for my life . . . nor him . . .
 Though something I have somewhat overdone,—
 For instance, when I went to see the gods
 One morning on Olympus, with a step
 That shook the thunder from a certain cloud,
 Committing myself vilely. Could I think,
 The Muse I pulled my heart out from my breast
 To soften, had herself a sort of heart,
 And loved my mortal? He, at least loved her,
 I heard him say so; 'twas my recompense,
 When, watching at his bedside fourteen days,
 He broke out like a flame at whiles
 Between the heats of fever . . . 'Is it thou?
 'Breathe closer, sweetest mouth!' and when at last
 The fever gone, the wasted face extinct
 As if it irked him much to know me there,
 He said, 'Twas kind, 'twas good, 'twas womanly;
 (And fifty praises to excuse no love)
 'But was the picture safe he had ventured for?'
 And then, half wandering . . . 'I have loved her well,
 'Although she could not love me.'—
 'Say instead,'
 I answered, 'she does love you.'—'Twas my turn
 To rave: I would have married him so changed,

Although the world had jeered me properly
 For taking up with Cupid at his worst,
 The silver quiver worn off on his hair.
 'No, no,' he murmured, 'no, she loves me not;
 'Aurora Leigh does better: bring her book
 'And read it softly, Lady Waldemar,
 'Until I thank your friendship more for that
 'Than even for harder service.' So I read
 Your book, Aurora, for an hour that day:
 I kept its pauses, marked its emphasis;
 My voice, empaled upon its hooks of rhyme,
 Not once would writhe, nor quiver, nor revolt;
 I read on calmly,—calmly shut it up,
 Observing, 'There's some merit in the book;
 'And yet the merit in't is thrown away
 'As chances still with women if we write
 'Or write not: we want string to tie our flowers,
 'So drop them as we walk, which serves to show
 'The way we went. Good morning, Mister Leigh;
 'You'll find another reader the next time.
 'A woman who does better than to love,
 'I hate; she will do nothing very well:
 'Male poets are preferable, straining less
 'And teaching more.' I triumphed o'er you both,
 And left him.
 'When I saw him afterward,
 I had read your shameful letter, and my heart.
 He came with health recovered, strong though pale,
 Lord Howe and he, a courteous pair of friends,
 To say what men dare say to women, when
 Their debtors. But I stopped them with a word,
 And proved I had never trodden such a road
 To carry so much dirt upon my shoe.

Then, putting into it something of disdain,
 I asked forsooth his pardon, and my own,
 For having done no better than to love,
 And that not wisely,—though 'twas long ago,
 And had been mended radically since.
 I told him, as I tell you now Miss Leigh,
 And proved I took some trouble for his sake
 (Because I knew he did not love the girl)
 To spoil my hands with working in the stream
 Of that poor bubbling nature,—till she went,
 Consigned to one I trusted, my own maid,
 Who once had lived full five months in my house,
 (Dressed hair superbly) with a lavish purse
 To carry to Australia where she had left
 A husband, said she. If the creature lied,
 The mission failed, we all do fail and lie
 More or less—and I'm sorry—which is all
 Expected from us when we fail the most
 And go to trouble to own it. What I meant,
 Was just the best for him, and me, and her . . .
 Best even for Marian!—I am sorry for't,
 And very sorry. Yet my creature said
 She saw her stop to speak in Oxford Street
 To one . . . no matter! I had sooner cut
 My hand off (though 'twere kissed the hour before,
 And promised a Duke's troth-ring for the next)
 Than crush her silly head with so much wrong.
 Poor child! I would have mended it with gold,
 Until it gleamed like St. Sophia's dome
 When all the faithful troop to morning prayer:
 But he, he nipped the bud of such a thought
 With that cold Leigh look which I fancied once,

And broke in, 'Henceforth she was called his wife.
 'His wife required no succour: he was bound
 'To Florence, to resume this broken bond:
 'Enough so. Both were happy, he and Howe,
 'To acquit me of the heaviest charge of all—'
 —At which I shut my tongue against my fly
 And struck him; 'Would he carry,—he was just,
 'A letter from me to Aurora Leigh,
 'And ratify from his authentic mouth
 'My answer to her accusation?'—'Yes,
 'If such a letter were prepared in time.'
 —He's just, your cousin,—ay, abhorrently.
 He'd wash his hands in blood to keep them clean,
 And so, cold, courteous, a mere gentleman,
 He bowed, we parted.
 'Parted. Face no more,
 Voice no more, love no more! wiped wholly out
 Like some ill scholar's scrawl from heart and slate.—
 Ay, spit on and so wiped out utterly
 By some coarse scholar! I have been too coarse,
 Too human. Have we business, in our rank,
 With blood i' the veins? I will have henceforth none,
 Not even to keep the colour at my lip.
 A rose is pink and pretty without blood;
 Why not a woman? When we've played in vain
 The game, to adore,—we have resources still,
 And can play on at leisure, being adored:
 Here's Smith already swearing at my feet
 That I'm the typic She. Away with Smith!—
 Smith snacks of Leigh,—and, henceforth I'll admit
 No socialist within three crinolines,
 To live and have his being. But for you,
 Though insolent your letter and absurd,

And though I hate you frankly,—take
 my Smith !
 For when you have seen this famous
 marriage tied,
 A most unspotted Erle to a noble Leigh,
 (His love astray on one he should not
 love)
 Howbeit you may not want his love, be-
 ware,
 You'll want some comfort. So I leave
 you Smith ;
 Take Smith !—he talks Leigh's subjects,
 somewhat worse ;
 Adopts a thought of Leigh's, and dwindle
 it ;
 Goes leagues beyond, to be no inch be-
 hind ;
 Will mind you of him, as a shoe-string
 may
 Of a man : and women, when they are
 made like you,
 Grow tender to a shoe-string, foot-print
 even,
 Adore averted shoulders in a glass,
 And memories of what, present once,
 was loathed.
 And yet, you loathed not Romney,—
 though you played
 At 'fox and goose' about him with your
 soul :
 Pass over fox, you rub out fox,—ignore
 A feeling, you eradicate it,—the act's
 Identical.

'I wish you joy, Miss Leigh,
 You've made a happy marriage for your
 friend,
 And all the honour, well-assorted love,
 Derives from you who love him, whom
 he loves !
 You need not wish *me* joy to think of it,
 I have so much. Observe, Aurora Leigh,
 Your droop of eyelid is the same as his,
 And, but for you, I might have won his
 love,
 And, to you, I have shown my naked
 heart,—
 For which three things I hate, hate, hate
 you. Hush,
 Suppose a fourth !—I cannot choose but
 think
 That, with him, I were virtuouser than
 you
 Without him : so I hate you from this
 gulf

And hollow of my soul, which opens
 out
 To what, except for you, had been my
 heaven,
 And is instead, a place to curse by !
 LOVE.'

An active kind of curse. I stood there
 cursed
 Confounded. I had seized and caught
 the sense
 Of the letter with its twenty stinging
 snakes,
 In a moment's sweep of eyesight, and I
 stood
 Dazed.—'Ah !—not married ?'
 'You mistake,' he said,
 'I'm married. Is not Marian Erle my
 wife ?
 As God sees things, I have a wife and
 child ;
 And I, as I'm a man who honours God,
 Am here to claim them as my child and
 wife.'

I felt it hard to breathe, much less to
 speak.
 Nor word of mine was needed. Some
 one else
 Was there for answering. 'Romney,'
 she began,
 'My great good angel, Romney.'

Then at first,
 I knew that Marian Erle was beautiful.
 She stood there, still and pallid as a
 saint,
 Dilated, like a saint in ecstasy,
 As if the floating moonshine interposed
 Betwixt her foot and the earth, and raised
 her up
 To float upon it. 'I had left my child,
 Who sleeps,' she said, 'and having
 drawn this way
 I heard you speaking, . . friend !—Con-
 firm me now.
 You take this Marian, such as wicked
 men
 Have made her, for your honourable
 wife ?'

The thrilling, solemn, proud, pathetic
 voice.
 He stretched his arms out toward the
 thrilling voice,
 As if to draw it on to his embrace.

—‘I take her as God made her, and as men
Must fail to unmake her, for my honoured wife.’

She never raised her eyes, nor took a step,
But stood there in her place, and spoke again.

—‘You take this Marian’s child, which is her shame
In sight of men and women, for your child,
Of whom you will not ever feel ashamed?’

The thrilling, tender, proud, pathetic voice.

He stepped on toward it, still with outstretched arms,

As if to quench upon his breast that voice.

—‘May God so father me, as I do him,
And so forsake me as I let him feel
He’s orphaned haply. Here I take the child

To share my cup, to slumber on my knee,

To play his loudest gambol at my foot,
To hold my finger in the public ways,
Till none shall need inquire, ‘Whose child is this,’

The gesture saying so tenderly, ‘My own.’

She stood a moment silent in her place;
Then turning toward me very slow and cold—

—‘And you,—what say you?—will you blame me much,

If, careful for that outcast child of mine,
I catch this hand that’s stretched to me and him,

Nor dare to leave him friendless in the world

Where men have stoned me? Have I not the right

To take so mere an aftermath from life,
Else found so wholly bare? Or is it wrong

To let your cousin, for a generous bent,
Put out his ungloved fingers among briars

To set a tumbling bird’s nest somewhat straight?

You will not tell him, though we’re innocent

We are not harmless, . . and that both our harms

Will stick to his good smooth noble life like burrs,

Never to drop off though he shakes the cloak?

You’ve been my friend: you will not now be his?

You’ve known him that he’s worthy of a friend,

And you’re his cousin, lady, after all,
And therefore more than free to take his

part,
Explaining, since the nest is surely spoilt,

And Marian what you know her,—though a wife,

The world would hardly understand her case

Of being just hurt and honest; while for him,

’Twould ever twit him with his bastard child

And married harlot. Speak, while yet there’s time:

You would not stand and let a good man’s dog

Turn round and rend him, because his, and reared

Of a generous breed,—and will you let his act,

Because it’s generous? Speak. I’m bound to you,

And I’ll be bound by only you, in this’
The thrilling solemn voice, so passionless,

Sustained, yet low, without a rise or fall,
As one who had authority to speak,

And not as Marian.

I looked up to feel

If God stood near me, and beheld his heaven

As blue as Aaron’s priestly robe appeared
To Aaron when he took it off to die.

And then I spoke—‘Accept the gift, I say,

My sister Marian, and be satisfied.
The hand that gives, has still a soul behind

Which will not let it quail for having given,

Though foolish wordlings talk they know not what

Of what they know not. Romney's
strong enough
For this : do you be strong to know he's
strong :

He stands on Right's side ; never flinch
for him,

As if he stood on the other. You'll be
bound

By me ? I am a woman of repute ;
No fly-blow gossip ever specked my life ;
My name is clean and open as this hand,
Whose glove there's not a man dares
blab about

As if he had touched it freely. Here's
my hand

To clasp your hand, my Marian, owned
as pure !

As pure,—as I'm a woman and a
Leigh !—

And, as I'm both, I'll witness to the
world

That Romney Leigh is honoured in his
choice

Who chooses Marian for his honoured
wife.'

Her broad wild woodland eyes shot out a
light ;

Her smile was wonderful for rapture.
' Thanks,

My great Aurora.' Forward then she
sprang,

And dropping her impassioned spaniel
head

With all its brown abandonment of curls
On Romney's feet, we heard the kisses
drawn

Through sobs upon the foot, upon the
ground—

' O Romney ! O my angel ! O unchanged,
Though since we've parted I have passed
the grave !

But Death itself could only better *thee*,
Not change thee !—*Thee* I do not thank
at all :

I but thank God who made thee what
thou art,

So wholly godlike.'

When he tried in vain

To raise her to his embrace, escaping
thence

As any leaping fawn from a huntsman's
grasp

She bounded off and 'lighted beyond
reach,

Before him with a staglike majesty
Of soft, serene defiance,—as she knew
He could not touch her, so was tolerant
He had cared to try. She stood there
with her great

Drowned eyes, and dripping cheeks, and
strange sweet smile

That lived through all, as if one held a
light

Across a waste of waters,—shook her
head

To keep some thoughts down deeper in
her soul,—

Then, white and tranquil like a summer-
cloud

Which, having rained itself to a tardy
peace,

Stands still in heaven as if it ruled the
day,

Spoke out again—' Although, my gener-
ous friend,

Since last we met and parted you're un-
changed,

And, having promised faith to Marian
Erle,

Maintain it, as she were not changed at
all ;

And though that's worthy, though that's
full of balm

To any conscious spirit of a girl
Who once has loved you as I loved you
once,—

Yet still it will not make her . . if she's
dead,

And gone away where none can give or
take

In marriage,—able to revive, return
And wed you,—will it Romney ? Here's
the point ;

O friend, we'll see it plainer : you and I
Must never, never, never join hands so.

Nay, let me say it,—for I said it first
To God, and placed it, rounded to an
oath,

Far, far above the moon there, at His
feet,

As surely as I wept just now at yours,—
We never, never, never join hands so.

And now, be patient with me ; do not
think

I'm speaking from a false humility.
The truth is, I am grown so proud with
grief,

And He has said so often through his
nights

And through his mornings, 'Weep a little still,
 'Thou foolish Marian, because women must,
 'But do not blush at all except for sin,'—
 That I, who felt myself unworthy once
 Of virtuous Romney and his high-born race,
 Have come to learn, . . . a woman poor or rich,
 Despised or honoured, is a human soul:
 And what her soul is,—that, she is herself,
 Although she should be spit upon of men,
 As is the pavement of the churches here,
 Still good enough to pray in. And being chaste
 And honest, and inclined to do the right,
 And love the truth, and live my life out green
 And smooth beneath his steps, I should not fear
 To make him thus a less uneasy time
 Than many a happier woman. Very proud
 You see me. Pardon, that I set a trap
 To hear a confirmation in your voice . . .
 Both yours and yours. It is so good to know
 'Twas really God who said the same before:
 For thus it is in heaven, that first God speaks,
 And then his angels. Oh, it does me good,
 It wipes me clean and sweet from devil's dirt,
 That Romney Leigh should think me worthy still
 Of being his true and honourable wife!
 Henceforth I need not say, on leaving earth,
 I had a glory in it. For the rest,
 The reason's ready (master, angel, friend,
 Be patient with me) wherefore you and I
 Can never, never, never join hands so.
 I know you'll not be angry like a man
 (For *you* are none) when I shall tell the truth,
 Which is, I do not love you, Romney Leigh,

I do not love you. Ah well! catch my hands,
 Miss Leigh, and burn into my eyes with yours,—
 I swear I do not love him. Did I once?
 'Tis said that women have been bruised to death,
 And yet, if once they loved, that love of theirs
 Could never be drained out with all their blood:
 I've heard such things and pondered. Did I indeed
 Love once? or did I only worship?
 Yes,
 Perhaps, O friend, I set you up so high
 Above all actual good or hope of good
 Or fear of evil, all that could be mine,
 I haply set you above love itself
 And out of reach of these poor women's arms,
 Angelic Romney. What was in my thought?
 To be your slave, your help, your toy, your tool.
 To be your love . . . I never thought of that.
 To give you love . . . still less. I gave you love?
 I think I did not give you anything;
 I was but only yours,—upon my knees,
 All yours, in soul and body, in head and heart,
 A creature you had taken from the ground,
 Still crumbling through your fingers to your feet
 To join the dust she came from. Did I love,
 Or did I worship? judge, Aurora Leigh!
 But, if indeed I loved, 'twas long ago,—
 So long! before the sun and moon were made,
 Before the hells were open,—ah, before
 I heard my child cry in the desert night,
 And knew he had no father. It may be
 I'm not as strong as other women are,
 Who, torn and crushed, are not undone from love.
 It may be, I am colder than the dead,
 Who, being dead, love always. But for me
 Once killed, . . . this ghost of Marian loves no more,

No more . . except the child! . . no more at all.
 I told your cousin, sir, that I was dead;
 And now, she thinks I'll get up from my grave,
 And wear my chin-cloth for a wedding veil,
 And glide along the churchyard like a bride,
 While all the dead keep whispering through the withes,
 'You would be better in your place with us,
 'You pitiful corruption!' At the thought,
 The damps break out on me like leprosy
 Although I'm clean. Ay, clean as Marian Erle:
 As Marian Leigh, I know, I were not clean:
 I have not so much life that I should love.
 . . Except the child. Ah God! I could not bear
 To see my darling on a good man's knees
 And know by such a look, or such a sigh,
 Or such a silence, that he thought sometimes,
 'This child was fathered by some cursed wretch' . .
 For, Romney,—angels are less tender-wise
 Than God and mothers: even *you* would think
 What *we* think never. He is ours, the child;
 And we would sooner vex a soul in heaven
 By coupling with it the dead body's thought,
 It left behind it in a last month's grave,
 Than, in my child, see other than . . my child.
 We only, never call him fatherless
 Who has God and his mother. O my babe,
 My pretty, pretty blossom, an ill-wind
 Once blew upon my breast! can any think
 I'd have another,—one called happier,
 A fathered child, with father's love and race

That's worn as bold and open as a smile,
 To vex my darling when he's asked his name
 And has no answer? What! a happier child
 Than mine, my best;—who laughed so loud to-night
 He could not sleep for pastime? Nay, I swear
 By life and love, that, if I lived like some,
 And loved like . . *some* . . ay, loved you, Romney Leigh,
 As some love (eyes that have wept so much, see clear)
 I've room for no more children in my arms,
 My kisses are all melted on one mouth,
 I would not push my darling to a stool
 To dandle babies. Here's a hand shall keep
 For ever clean without a marriage-ring,
 To tend my boy until he cease to need
 One steady finger of it, and desert
 (Not miss) his mother's lap, to sit with men.
 And when I miss him (not he me) I'll come
 And say, 'Now give me some of Romney's work,
 To help your outcast orphans of the world,
 And comfort grief with grief.' For you, meantime,
 Most noble Romney, wed a noble wife,
 And open on each other your great souls,—
 I need not farther bless you. If I dared
 But strain and touch her in her upper sphere
 And say, 'Come down to Romney—pay my debt!'
 I should be joyful with the stream of joy
 Sent through me. But the moon is in my face . .
 I dare not,—though I guess the name he loves;
 I'm learned with my studies of old days,
 Remembering how he crushed his underlip
 When some one came and spoke, or did not come:
 Aurora, I could touch her with my hand,
 And fly, because I dare not.'

She was gone.

He smiled so sternly that I spoke in
in haste.

'Forgive her—she sees clearly for her-
self:

Her instinct's holy.'

'I forgive?' he said,

'I only marvel how she sees so sure,
While others' . . . there he paused,—
then hoarse, abrupt,—

'Aurora, you forgive us, her and me?
For her, the thing she sees, poor loyal
child,

If once corrected by the thing I know,
Had been unspoken, since she loves you
well,

Has leave to love you:—while for me,
alas,

If once or twice I let my heart escape
This night, . . . remember, where hearts
slip and fall

They break beside: we're parting,—
parting,—ah,

You do not love, that you should surely
know

What that word means. Forgive, be
tolerant ;

It had not been, but that I felt myself
So safe in impuissance and despair,

I could not hurt you though I tossed my
arms

And sighed my soul out. The most
utter wretch

Will choose his postures when he comes
to die,

However in the presence of a queen :
And you'll forgive me some unseemly
spasms

Which meant no more than dying. Do
you think

I had ever come here in my perfect
mind,

Unless I had come here in my settled
mind

Bound Marian's, bound to keep the bond
and give

My name, my house, my hand, the
things I could,

To Marian? For even I could give as
much :

Even I, affronting her exalted soul
By a supposition that she wanted these,

Could act the husband's coat and hat set
up

To creak i' the wind and drive the world-
crows off

From pecking in her garden. Straw can
fill

A hole to keep out vermin. Now, at
last,

I own heaven's angels round her life
suffice

To fight the rats of our society,
Without this Romney: I can see at
last ;

And here is ended my pretention which
The most pretended. Over-proud of
course.

Even so !—but not so stupid . . . blind
. . . that I,

Whom thus the great Taskmaster of the
world

Has set to meditate mistaken work,
My dreary face against a dim blank wall

Throughout man's natural lifetime,—
could pretend

Or wish . . . O love, I have loved you !
O my soul,

I have lost you !—but I swear by all
yourself,

And all you might have been to me these
years

If that June-morning had not failed my
hope,—

I'm not so bestial, to regret that day
This night,—this night, which still to
you is fair ;

Nay, not so blind, Aurora. I attest
Those stars above us which I cannot
see' . . .

'You cannot.' . .

'That if Heaven itself should stoop,
Remix the lots, and give me another
chance,

I'd say, 'No other !'—I'd record my
blank.

Aurora never should be wife of mine.'

'Not see the stars?'

'Tis worse still, not to see
To find your hand, although we're part-
ing, dear.

A moment let me hold it ere we part ;
And understand my last words—these at
last !

I would not have you thinking when I'm
gone

That Romney dared to hanker for your
love

In thought or vision, if attainable,
 (Which certainly for me it never was)
 And wished to use it for a dog to-day,
 To help the blind man stumbling. God
 forbid!

And now I know he held you in his
 palm,
 And kept you open-eyed to all my faults,
 To save you at last from such a dreary
 end.

Believe me, dear, that if I had known
 like Him

What loss was coming on me, I had
 done

As well in this as He has.—Farewell
 you

Who are still my light,—farewell! How
 late it is:

I know that, now: you've been too pa-
 tient, sweet.

I will but blow my whistle toward the
 lane,

And some one comes . . the same who
 brought me here.

Get in—Good night.'

'A moment. Heavenly Christ!

A moment. Speak once, Romney. 'Tis
 not true.

I hold your hands, I look into your
 face—

You see me?'

'No more than the blessed stars.

Be blessed too, Aurora. Nay, my
 sweet,

You tremble. Tender-hearted! Do
 you mind

Of yore, dear, how you used to cheat old
 John,

And let the mice out slyly from his traps,
 Until he marvelled at the soul in mice

Which took the cheese and left the
 snare? The same

Dear soft heart always! 'Twas for this
 I grieved

Howe's letter never reached you. Ah,
 you had heard

Of illness,—not the issue . . not the
 extent:

My life long sick with tossings up and
 down,

The sudden revulsion in the blazing
 house,

The strain and struggle both of body
 and soul, [blood:

Which left fire running in my veins for

Scarce lacked that thunderbolt of the
 falling beam

Which nicked me on the forehead as I
 passed

The gallery-door with a burden. Say
 heaven's bolt,

Not William Erle's, not Marian's fa-
 ther's,—tramp

And poacher, whom I found for what he
 was,

And, eager for her sake to rescue him,
 Forth swept from the open highway of

the world,
 Road-dust and all,—till like a woodland

boar
 Most naturally unwilling to be tamed,

He notched me with his tooth. But not
 a word

To Marian! and I do not think, be-
 sides,

He turned the tilting of the beam my
 way,—

And if he laughed, as many swear, poor
 wretch,

Nor he nor I supposed the hurt so deep.
 We'll hope his next laugh may be mer-

rier,
 In a better cause.'

'Blind, Romney?'

'Ah, my friend,

You'll learn to say it in a cheerful voice.
 I, too, at first desponded. To be blind,

Turned out of nature, mulcted as a man,
 Refused the daily largesse of the sun

To humble creatures! When the fever's
 heat

Dropped from me, as the flame did from
 my house,

And left me ruined like it, stripped of all
 The hues and shapes of aspectable life,

A mere bare blind stone in the blaze of
 day.

A man, upon the outside of the earth,
 As dark as ten feet under, in the grave,—

Why that seemed hard.'

'No hope?'

'A tear! you weep,

Divine Aurora? tears upon my hand!
 I've seen you weeping for a mouse, a

bird,—
 But, weep for me, Aurora? Yes, there's

hope.
 Not hope of sight,—I could be learned,

dear, [name
 And tell you in what Greek and Latin

The visual nerve is withered to the root,
Though the outer eyes appear indifferent,

Unspotted in their chrystals. But there's
hope.

The spirit, from behind this dethroned
sense,

Sees, waits in patience till the walls
break up

From which the bas-relief and fresco
have dropt:

There's hope. The man here, once so
arrogant

And restless, so ambitious, for his part,
Of dealing with statistically packed

Disorders, (from a pattern on his nail,
And packing such things quite another

way,—
Is now contented. From his personal
loss

He has come to hope for others when
they lose,

And wear a gladder faith in what we
gain . .

Through bitter experience, compensation
sweet,

Like that tear, sweetest. I am quiet
now,

As tender surely for the suffering world,
But quiet,—sitting at the wall to learn,

Content henceforth to do the thing I
can :

For, though as powerless, said I, as a
stone,

A stone can still give shelter to a worm,
And it is worth while being a stone for
that :

There's hope, Aurora.'

'Is there hope for me?
For me?—and is there room beneath the
stone

For such a worm?—And if I came and
said . .

What all this weeping scarce will let me
say,

And yet what women cannot say at all
But weeping bitterly . . (the pride keeps
up,

Until the heart breaks under it) . . I
love,—

I love you, Romney' . .

'Silence!' he exclaimed.

'A woman's pity sometimes makes her
mad. [soul

A man's distraction must not cheat his

To take advantage of it. Yet, 'tis hard—
Farewell, Aurora.'

'But I love you, sir :
And when a woman says she loves a
man,

The man must hear her, though he
love her not,

Which . . hush! . . he has leave to
answer in his turn :

She will not surely blame him. As for
me,

You call it pity,—think I'm generous?
'Twere somewhat easier, for a woman
proud

As I am, and I'm very vilely proud,
To let it pass as such, and press on you

Love born of pity,—seeing that excellent
loves

Are born so, often, nor the quicklier die,
And this would set me higher by the
head

Than now I stand. No matter: let the
truth

Stand high: Aurora must be humble :
no,

My love's not pity merely. Obviously
I'm not a generous woman, never was,

Or else, of old, I had not looked so near
To weights and measures, grudging you
the power

To give, as first I scorned your power to
judge

For me, Aurora: I would have no gifts
Forsooth, but God's,—and I would use
them too

According to my pleasure and my choice,
As He and I were equals,—you below,

Excluded from that level of interchange
Admitting benefaction. You were wrong
In much? you said so. I was wrong in
most.

Oh, most! You only thought to rescue
men

By half-means, half-way, seeing half
their wants,

While thinking nothing of your personal
gain.

But I who saw the human nature broad
At both sides, comprehending too the
soul's,

And all the high necessities of Art,
Betrayed the thing I saw, and wronged
my own life

For which I pleaded. Passioned to
exalt

The artist's instinct in me at the cost
 Of putting down the woman's—I forgot
 No perfect artist is developed here
 From any imperfect woman. Flower
 from root,
 And spiritual from natural, grade by
 grade
 In all our life. A handful of the earth
 To make God's image! the despised
 poor earth,
 The healthy odorous earth,—I missed,
 with it,
 The divine Breath that blows the nos-
 trils out
 To ineffable inflatus: ay, the breath
 Which love is. Art is much, but Love is
 more.
 O Art, my Art, thou'rt much, but Love
 is more!
 Art symbolises heaven, but Love is God.
 And makes heaven. I, Aurora, fell from
 mine:
 I would not be a woman like the rest,
 A simple woman who believes in love
 And owns the right of love because she
 loves,
 And, hearing she's beloved, is satisfied
 With what contents God: I must ana-
 lyse,
 Confront, and question; just as if a fly
 Refused to warm itself in any sun
 Till such was *in leone*: I must fret
 Forsooth, because the month was only
 May;
 Be faithless of the kind of proffered love,
 And captious, lest it miss my dignity,
 And scornful, that my lover sought a
 wife
 To use . . . to use! O Romney, O my
 love,
 I am changed since then, changed
 wholly,—for indeed
 If now you'd stoop so low to take my
 love,
 And use it roughly, without stint or
 spare,
 As men use common things with more
 behind,
 (And, in this, ever would be more be-
 hind)
 To any mean and ordinary end,—
 The joy would set me like a star, in
 heaven,
 So high up, I should shine because of
 height

And not of virtue. Yet in one respect,
 Just one, beloved, I am in no wise
 changed:
 I love you, loved you . . . loved you first
 and last,
 And love you on for ever. Now I know
 I loved you always, Romney. She who
 died
 Knew that, and said so; Lady Walde-
 mar
 Knows that; . . . and Marian: I had
 known the same
 Except that I was prouder than I knew,
 And not so honest. Ay, and as I live,
 I should have died so, crushing in my
 hand
 This rose of love, the wasp inside and
 all,
 Ignoring ever to my soul and you
 Both rose and pain,—except for this
 great loss,
 This great despair,—to stand before your
 face
 And know you do not see me where I
 stand.
 You think, perhaps, I am not changed
 from pride,
 And that I chiefly bear to say such
 words
 Because you cannot shame me with your
 eyes?
 O calm, grand eyes, extinguished in a
 storm,
 Blown out like lights o'er melancholy
 seas,
 Though shrieked for by the shipwrecked,
 —O my Dark,
 My Cloud,—to go before me every day
 While I go ever toward the wilderness,—
 I would that you could see me bare to
 the soul!
 If this be pity, 'tis so for myself,
 And not for Romney; *he* can stand
 alone;
 A man like *him* is never overcome:
 No woman like me, counts him pitiable
 While saints applaud him. He mistook
 the world:
 But I mistook my own heart,—and that
 slip
 Was fatal. Romney,—will you leave me
 here?
 So wrong, so proud, so weak, so uncon-
 soled,
 So mere a woman!—and I love you so,

I love you, Romney.
 Could I see his face,
 I wept so? Did I drop against his
 breast,
 Or did his arms constrain me? Were
 my cheeks
 Hot, overflowed, with my tears, or his?
 And which of our two large explosive
 hearts
 So shook me? That, I know not. There
 were words
 That broke in utterance . . melted, in
 the fire;
 Embrace, that was convulsion, . . then
 a kiss
 As long and silent as the ecstatic night,
 And deep, deep, shuddering breaths,
 which meant beyond
 Whatever could be told by word or kiss.

But what he said . . I have written day
 by day,
 With somewhat even writing. Did I
 think
 That such a passionate rain would inter-
 cept
 And dash this last page? What he said,
 indeed,
 I fain would write it down here like the
 rest
 To keep it in my eyes, as in my ears,
 The heart's sweet scripture, to be read
 at night
 When weary, or at morning when afraid,
 And lean my heaviest oath on when I
 swear
 That when all's done, all tried, all count-
 ed here.
 All great arts, and all good philosophies,
 This love just puts its hand out in a
 dream,
 And straight outstretches all things.

What he said,
 I fain would write. But if an angel spoke
 In thunder, should we, haply know much
 more
 Than that it thundered? If a cloud
 came down
 And wrapt us wholly, could we draw its
 shape,
 As if on the outside and not overcome?
 And so he spake. His breath against
 my face
 Confused his words, yet made them more
 intense,—

As when the sudden finger of the wind
 Will wipe a row of single city-lamps
 To a pure white line of flame, more
 luminous
 Because of obliteration; more intense,
 The intimate presence carrying in itself
 Complete communication, as with souls
 Who, having put the body off, perceive
 Through simply being. 'Thus, 'twas
 granted me
 To know he loved me to the depth and
 height
 Of such large natures, ever competent
 With grand horizons by the sea or land,
 To love's grand sunrise. Small spheres
 hold small fires:
 But he loved largely, as a man can love
 Who, baffled in his love, dares live his
 life,
 Accept the ends which God loves for
 his own,
 And lift a constant aspect.

From the day
 I brought to England my poor searching
 face
 (An orphan even of my father's grave)
 He had loved me, watched me, watched
 his soul in mine,
 Which in me grew and heightened into
 love.
 For he, a boy still, had been told the
 tale
 Of how a fairy bride from Italy,
 With smells of oleanders in her hair,
 Was coming through the vines to touch
 his hand;
 Whereat the blood of boyhood on the
 palm
 Made sudden heats. And when at last I
 came,
 And lived before him, lived, and rarely
 smiled,
 He smiled and loved me for the thing I
 was,
 As every child will love the year's first
 flower,
 (Not certainly the fairest of the year,
 But, in which, the complete year seems
 to blow)
 The poor sad snowdrop,—growing be-
 tween drifts,
 Mysterious medium 'twixt the plant and
 frost,
 So faint with winter while so quick with
 spring,

So doubtful if to thaw itself away
 With that snow near it. Not that Romney Leigh
 Had loved me coldly. If I thought so
 once,
 It was as if I had held my hand in fire
 And shook for cold. But now I understood
 For ever, that the very fire and heat
 Of troubling passion in him burned him
 clear,
 And shaped to dubious order, word and
 act.
 That, just because he loved me over all,
 All wealth, all lands, all social privilege,
 To which chance made him unexpected
 heir,
 And, just because on all these lesser
 gifts,
 Constrained by conscience and the sense
 of wrong
 He had stamped with steady hand God's
 arrow-mark
 Of dedication to the human need,
 He thought it should be so too, with his
 love:
 He, passionately loving, would bring
 down
 His love, his life, his best, (because the
 best)
 His bride of dreams, who walked so still
 and high
 Through flowery poems as through
 meadow-grass,
 The dust of golden lilies on her feet,
 That *she* should walk beside him on the
 rocks
 In all that clang and hewing out of men,
 And help the work of help which was
 his life,
 And prove he kept back nothing,—not
 his soul.
 And when I failed him,—for I failed
 him, I—
 And when it seemed he had missed my
 love,—he thought,
 'Aurora makes room for a working-
 noon;'
 And so, self-girded with torn strips of
 hope,
 Took up his life as if it were for death,
 (Just capable of one heroic aim.)
 And threw it in the thickest of the world,
 At which men laughed as if he had
 drowned a dog.

No wonder,—since Aurora failed him
 first!
 The morning and the evening made his
 day.
 But oh, the night! oh, bitter-sweet! oh,
 sweet!
 O dark, O moon and stars, O ecstasy
 Of darkness! O great mystery of love,
 In which absorbed, loss, anguish, treas-
 on's self
 Enlarges rapture,—as a pebble dropt
 In some full wine-cup over-brims the
 wine!
 While we two sate together, leaned that
 night
 So close, my very garments crept and
 thrilled
 With strange electric life; and both my
 cheeks
 Grew red, then pale, with touches from
 my hair
 In which his breath was; while the gold-
 en moon
 Was hung before our faces as the badge
 Of some sublime inherited despair,
 Since ever to be seen by only one,—
 A voice said, low and rapid as a sigh,
 Yet breaking, I felt conscious, from a
 smile,
 'Thank God, who made me blind, to
 make me see!
 Shine on, Aurora, dearest light of souls,
 Which rul'st for evermore both day and
 night!
 I am happy.'
 I flung closer to his breast,
 As sword that, after battle, flings to
 sheath;
 And, in that hurtle of united souls,
 The mystic motions which in common
 moods
 Are shut beyond our sense, broke in on
 us,
 And, as we sate, we felt the old earth
 spin,
 And all the starry turbulence of worlds
 Swing round us in their audient circles,
 till
 If that same golden moon were overhead
 Or if beneath our feet, we did nor know.
 And then calm, equal, smooth with
 weights of joy
 His voice rose, as some chief musician's
 song

Amid the old Jewish temple's Selah-
 pause,
 And bade me mark how we two met at
 last
 Upon this moon-bathed promontory of
 earth,
 To give up much on each side, then take
 all.
 'Beloved,' it sang, 'we must be here to
 work;
 And men who work can only work for
 men,
 And not to work in vain, must compre-
 hend
 Humanity, and so work humanly,
 And raise men's bodies still by raising
 souls,
 As God did first.'

'But stand upon the earth,'
 I said, 'to raise them,—(this is human
 too;
 There's nothing high which has not first
 been low,
 My humbleness, said One, has made me
 great!)
 As God did last.'

'And work all silently,
 And simply,' he returned, 'as God does
 all;

Distort our nature never for our work,
 Nor count our right hands stronger for
 being hoofs.

The man most man, with tenderest hu-
 man hands,
 Works best for men,—as God in Naza-
 reth.'

He paused upon the word, and then re-
 sumed:

'Fewer programmes, we who have no
 prescience.

Fewer systems, we who are held and do
 not hold.

Less mapping out of masses to be saved,
 By nations or by sexes. Fourier's void,
 And Comte absurd,—and Cabet, puerile.
 Subsists no law of life outside of life,
 No perfect manners, without Christian
 souls.

The Christ himself had been no Law-
 giver,

Unless he had given the life, too, with
 the law.'

I echoed thoughtfully—'The man, most
 man,

Works best for men: and, if most man
 indeed,

He gets his manhood plainest from his
 soul:

While obviously this stringent soul itself
 Obeys our old law of development;

The Spirit ever witnessing in ours,
 And Love, the soul of soul, within the
 soul,

Evolving it sublimely. First, God's
 love.'

'And next,' he smiled, 'the love of
 wedded souls,

Which still presents that mystery's coun-
 terpart.

Sweet shadow-rose, upon the water of
 life,

Of such a mystic substance, Sharon
 gave

A name to! human, vital, fructuous rose,
 Whose calyx holds the multitude of
 leaves.

Loves filial, loves fraternal, neighbour-
 loves,

And civic, . . all fair petals, all good
 scents,

All reddened, sweetened from one central
 Heart!'

'Alas,' I cried, 'it was not long ago,
 You swore this very social rose smelt
 ill.'

'Alas,' he answered, 'is it a rose at all?
 The filial's thankless, the fraternal's
 hard,

The rest is lost. I do but stand and
 think,

Across the waters of a troubled life
 The Flower of Heaven so vainly over-
 hangs,

What perfect counterpart would be in
 sight,

If tanks were clearer. Let us clean the
 tubes,

And wait for rains. O poet, O my love,
 Since I was too ambitious in my deed,

And thought to distance all men in suc-
 cess,

Till God came on me, marked the place,
 and said,

'Ill-doer, henceforth keep within this
 line,

Attempting less than others,'—and I
 stand

And work among Christ's little ones,
content,—
Come thou, my compensation, my dear
sight,
My morning-star, my morning ! rise and
shine,
And touch my hills with radiance not
their own.
Shine out for two, Aurora, and fulfil
My falling-short that must be ! work for
two,
As I, though thus restrained, for two,
shall love !
Gaze on, with inscient vision toward the
sun,
And, from his visceral heat, pluck out
the roots
Of light beyond him. Art's a service,—
mark :
A silver key is given to thy clasp,
And thou shalt stand unwearied, night
and day,
And fix it in the hard, slow-turning wards,
And open, so, that intermediate door
Betwixt the different planes of sensuous
form
And form insensuous, that inferior men
May learn to feel on still through these
to those,
And bless thy ministration. The world
waits
For help. Beloved, let us love so well,
Our work shall still be better for our
love,
And still our love be sweeter for our
work,
And both commended, for the sake of
each,
By all true workers and true lovers born.
Now press thy clarion on thy woman's
lip
(Love's holy kiss shall still keep conse-
crate)
And breathe the fine keen breath along
the brass,
And blow all class-walls level as Jeri-
cho's
Past Jordan ; crying from the top of
souls,
To souls, that here assembled on earth's
flats,

To get them to some purer eminence
Than any hitherto beheld for clouds !
What height we know not,—but the way
we know,
And how by mounting ever, we attain,
And so climb on. It is the hour for
souls ;
That bodies, leavened by the will and
love,
Be lightened to redemption. The world's
old ;
But the old world waits the time to be
renewed :
Toward which, new hearts in individual
growth
Must quicken, and increase to multitude
In new dynasties of the race of men,—
Developed whence, shall grow spon-
taneously
New churches, new oeconomies, new
laws
Admitting freedom, new societies
Excluding falsehood. He shall make
all new.'
My Romney !—Lifting up my hand in
his,
As wheeled by Seeing spirits toward the
east,
He turned instinctively,—where, faint
and far,
Along the tingling desert of th. sky,
Beyond the circle of the conscious hills,
Were laid in jasper-stone as clear as
glass
The first foundations of that new, near
Day
Which should be builded out of heaven
to God.
He stood a moment with erected brows,
In silence, as a creature might, who
gazed :
Stood calm, and fed his blind, majestic
eyes
Upon the thought of perfect noon. And
when
I saw his soul saw,—' Jasper first,' I
said,
' And second, sapphire ; third, chalce-
dony ;
The rest in order, . . last, an amethyst.'

PROMETHEUS BOUND.

PERSONS OF THE DRAMA.

PROMETHEUS. HEPHÆSTUS.
OCEANUS. Io, daughter of Inachus.
HERMES. STRENGTH and FORCE.

CHORUS of Ocean Nymphs.

SCENE.—STRENGTH and FORCE, HEPHÆSTUS
and PROMETHEUS at the Rocks.

Strength.

WE reach the utmost limit of the earth,
The Scythian track, the desert without
man,
And now, Hephæstus, thou must needs
fulfil

The mandate of our father, and with
links

Indissoluble of adamantine chains,
Fasten against this beetling precipice
This guilty god! Because he filched
away

Thine own bright flower, the glory of
plastic fire,

And gifted mortals with it,—such a sin
It doth behove he expiate to the gods,
Learning to accept the empery of Zeus,
And leave off his old trick of loving man.

Hephæstus. O Strength and Force,—
for you, or Zeus's will

Presents a deed for doing.—No more!
—but I,

I lack your daring, up this storm-rent
chasm

To fix with violent hands a kindred god,
Howbeit necessity compels me so

That I must dare it,—and our Zeus com-
mands

With a most inevitable word. Ho, thou!
High-thoughted son of Themis who is
sage,

Thee loth, I loth must rivet fast in
chains

Against this rocky height unclomb by
man,

Where never human voice nor face shall
find

Out thee who lov'st them!—and thy
beauty's flower,

Scorched in the sun's clear heat, shall
fade away.

Night shall come up with garniture of
stars

To comfort thee with shadow, and the
sun

Disperse with retriect beams the morn-
ing frosts;

And through all changes, sense of pres-
ent woe

Shall vex thee sore, because with none
of them

There comes a hand to free. Such fruit
is plucked

From love of man!—for in that thou, a
god,

Didst brave the wrath of gods and give
away

Undue respect to mortals; for that
crime

Thou art adjudged to guard this joyless
rock,

Erect, unslumbering, bending not the
knee,

And many a cry and unavailing moan
To utter on the air! For Zeus is stern,

And new-made kings are cruel.
Strength. Be it so.

Why loiter in vain pity? Why not hate
A god the gods hate?—one too who be-
trayed

Thy glory unto men?
Hephæstus. An awful thing

Is kinship joined to friendship.
Strength. Grant it be;

Is disobedience to the Father's word
A possible thing? Dost quail not more
for that?

Hephæstus. Thou, at least, art a
stern one! ever bold!

Strength. Why, if I wept, it were
no remedy.

And do not thou spend labor on the air
To bootless uses.

Hephæstus. Cursed handicraft!
I curse and hate thee, O my craft!

Strength. Why hate

Thy craft most plainly innocent of all
These pending ills?

Hephæstus. I would some other hand
Were here to work it!

Strength. All work hath its pain,
Except to rule the gods. There is none
free

Except King Zeus.

Hephæstus. I know it very well:
I argue not against it.

Strength. Why not, then,
Hake haste and lock the fetters over
HIM,

Lest Zeus behold thee lagging?

Hephæstus. Here be chains.
Zeus may behold these.

Strength. Seize him,—strike amain!
Strike with the hammer on each side his
hands—

Rivet him to the rock.

Hephæstus. The work is done,
And thoroughly done.

Strength. Still faster grapple him,—
Wedge him in deeper,—leave no inch
to stir!

He's terrible for finding a way out
From the irremediable.

Hephæstus. Here's an arm, at least,
Grappled past freeing.

Strength. Now, then, buckle me
The other securely. Let this wise one
learn

He's duller than our Zeus.

Hephæstus. Oh, none but he
Accuse me justly!

Strength. Now, straight through the
chest,

Take him and bite him with the clench-
ing tooth

Of the adamantine wedge, and rivet
him.

Hephæstus. Alas, Prometheus! what
thou sufferest here
I sorrow over.

Strength. Dost thou flinch again,
And breathe groans for the enemies of
Zeus?

Beware lest thine own pity find thee
out.

Hephæstus. Thou dost behold a spec-
tacle that turns

The sight o' the eyes to pity.

Strength. I behold
A sinner suffer his sin's penalty.

But lash the thongs about his sides.

Hephæstus. So much,
I must do. Urge no farther than I must.

Strength. Ay, but I *will* urge!—
and, with shout on shout,

Will hound thee at this quarry! Get
thee down

And ring amain the iron round his legs!

Hephæstus. That work was not long
doing.

Strength. Heavily now
Let fall the strokes upon the perforant
gyves!

For He who rates the work has a heavy
hand.

Hephæstus. Thy speech is savage as
thy shape.

Strength. Be thou
Gentle and tender! but revile not me

For the firm will and the untrunkling
hate.

Hephæstus. Let us go! He is netted
round with chains.

Strength. Here, now, taunt on! and
having spoiled the gods

Of honors, crown withal thy mortal men
Who live a whole day out! Why how
could *they*

Draw off from thee one single of thy
griefs?

Methinks the Demons gave thee a wrong
name,

Prometheus, which means Providence—
because

Thou dost thyself need providence to
see

Thy roll and ruin from the top of doom.

Prometheus alone. O holy Æther,
and swift winged Winds,

And River-wells, and laughter innum-
ous

Of yon Sea-waves! Earth, mother of
us all,

And all-viewing cyclic Sun, I cry on
you!—

Behold me a god, what I endure from
gods!

Behold with throe on throe,
How, wasted by this woe,

I wrestle down the myriad years of
Time!

Behold, how fast around me,
The new King of the happy ones sub-
lime

Has flung the chain he forged, has
shamed and bound me !

Woe, woe ! to day's woe and the com-
ing morrow's,

I cover with one groan ! And where is
found me

A limit to these sorrows ?

And yet what word do I say ? I have
foreknown

Clearly all things that should be—noth-
ing done

Comes sudden to my soul—and I must
bear

What is ordained with patience, being
aware

Necessity doth front the universe
With an invincible gesture. Yet this

curse

Which strikes me now, I find it hard to
brave

In silence or in speech. Because I gave
Honor to mortals, I have yoked my soul

To this compelling fate ! Because I
stole

The secret fount of fire, whose bubbles
went

Over the ferule's brim, and manward
sent

Art's mighty means and perfect rudi-
ment,

That sin I expiate in this agony ;
Hung here in fetters, 'neath the blanch-

ing sky !

Ah, ah me ! what a sound,

What a fragrance, sweeps up from a
pinion unseen

Of a god, or a mortal, or nature between,
Sweeping up to this rock where the earth

has her bound,

To have sight of my pangs,—or some
guerdon obtain—

Lo ! a god in the anguish, a god in the
chain !

The god, Zeus hateth sore

And his gods hate again,

As many as tread on his glorified floor,
Because I loved mortals too much ever-

more !

Alas me ! what a murmur and motion I
hear,

As of birds flying near !

And the air undersings

The light stroke of their wings—

And all life that approaches I wait for
in fear.

Chorus of Sea Nymphs, 1st Strophe.

Fear nothing ! our troop

Floats lovingly up

With a quick-oaring stroke

Of wings steered to the rock ;

Having softened the soul of our father
below !

For the gales of swift-bearing have sent
me a sound,

And the clank of the iron, the malleted
blow,

Smote down the profound

Of my caverns of old,

And struck the red light in a blush from
my brow,—

Till I sprang up unsandalled, in haste to
behold,

And rushed forth on my chariot of
wings manifold.

Prometheus. Alas me !—alas me !

Ye offspring of Tethys who bore at her
breast

Many children ; and eke of Oceanus,—
he,

Coiling still around earth with perpetual
unrest ;

Behold me and see

How transfixed with the fang

Of a fetter I hang

On the high jutting rocks of this fissure,
and keep

An uncoveted watch o'er the world and
the deep.

Chorus, 1st Antistrophe.

I behold thee, Prometheus—yet now,
yet now,

A terrible cloud whose rain is tears

Sweeps over mine eyes that witness how
Thy body appears

Hung awaste on the rocks by infrangi-
ble chains !

For new is the hand and the rudder that
steers

The ship of Olympus through surge and
wind—

And of old things passed, no track is
behind.

Prometheus. Under earth, under Hades,

Where the home of the shade is,
 All into the deep, deep Tartarus,
 I would he had hurled me adown !
 I would he had plunged me, fastened
 thus
 In the knotted chain with the savage
 clang,
 All into the dark, where there should be
 none,
 Neither god nor another, to laugh and
 see !
 But now the winds sing through and
 shake
 The hurtling chains wherein I hang—
 And I, in my naked sorrows, make
 Much mirth for my enemy.

Chorus, 2d Strophe.

Nay ! who of the gods hath a heart so
 stern
 As to use thy woe for a mock and
 mirth ?
 Who would not turn more mild to learn
 Thy sorrows ? who of the heaven and
 earth,
 Save Zeus ? But he
 Right wrathfully
 Bears on his sceptral soul unbent,
 And rules thereby the heavenly seed ;
 Nor will he pause till he content
 His thirsty heart in a finished deed ;
 Or till Another shall appear,
 To win by fraud, to seize by fear
 The hard-to-be-captured government.

Prometheus. Yet even of me he shall
 have need,
 That monarch of the blessed seed ;
 Of me, of me, who now am cursed
 By his fetters dire,—
 To ring my secret out withal
 And learn by whom his sceptre shall
 Be filched from him—as was, at first,
 His heavenly fire !
 But he never shall enchant me
 With his honey-lipped persuasion ;
 Never, never shall he daunt me
 With the oath and threat of passion,
 Into speaking as they want me,
 Till he loose this savage chain,
 And accept the expiation
 Of my sorrow, in his pain.

Chorus, 2d Antistrophe.

Thou art, sooth, a brave god,
 And, for all thou hast borne
 From the the stroke of the rod,
 Nought relaxest from scorn !
 But thou speakest unto me
 Too free and unworn—
 And a terror strikes through me
 And festers my soul
 And I fear, in the roll
 Of the storm, for thy fate
 In the ship far from shore—
 Since the son of Saturnius is hard in his
 hate
 And unmoved in his heart evermore.

Prometheus. I know that Zeus is
 stern !
 I know he metes his justice by his will !
 And yet his soul shall learn
 More softness when once broken by this
 ill,—
 And curbing his unconquerable vaunt
 He shall rush on in fear to meet with
 me
 Who rush to meet with him in agony,
 To issues of harmonious covenant.
Chorus. Remove the veil from all
 things, and relate
 The story to us !—of what crime accused,
 Zeus smites thee with dishonorable
 pangs.
 Speak ! if to teach us do not grieve thy-
 self.

Prometheus. The utterance of these
 things is torture to me,
 But so, too, is their silence ! each way
 lies
 Woe strong as fate !
 When gods began with wrath,
 And war rose up between their starry
 brows,
 Some choosing to cast Chronos from his
 throne
 That Zeus might king it there ; and
 some in haste
 With opposite oaths that they would
 have no Zeus
 To rule the gods forever,—I, who
 brought
 The counsel I thought meetest, could not
 move

The Titans, children of the Heaven and Earth,
 What time disdaining in their rugged souls
 My subtle machinations, they assumed
 It was an easy thing for force to take
 The mastery of fate. My mother, then,
 Who is called not only Themis but Earth too,
 (Her single beauty joys in many names,) Did teach me with reiterant prophecy
 What future should be,—and how conquering gods
 Should not prevail by strength and violence,
 But by guile only. When I told them so
 They would not deign to contemplate the truth
 On all sides round; whereat I deemed it best
 To lead my willing mother upwardly,
 And set my Themis face to face with Zeus
 As willing to receive her! Tartarus,
 With its abysmal cloister of the Dark,
 Because I gave that counsel, covers up
 The antique Chronos and his siding hosts;
 And, by that counsel helped, the king of gods
 Hath recompensed me with these bitter pangs!
 For kingship wears a cancer at the heart,—
 Distrust in friendship. Do ye also ask,
 What crime it is for which he tortures me—
 That shall be clear before you. When at first
 He filled his father's throne, he instantly
 Made various gifts of glory to the gods,
 And dealt the Empire out. Alone of men,
 Of miserable men he took no count,
 But yearned to sweep their track off from the world,
 And plant a newer race there! Not a god
 Resisted such desire except myself!
 I dared it! I drew mortals back to light,
 From meditated ruin deep as hell,—

For which wrong I am bent down in these pangs
 Dreadful to suffer, mournful to behold,—
 And I, who pitied man, am thought myself
 Unworthy of pity,—while I render out
 Deep rhythms of anguish 'neath the harping hand
 That strikes me thus!—a sight to shame your Zeus!
Chorus. Hard as thy chains, and cold as all these rocks,
 Is he, Prometheus, who withholds his heart
 From joining in thy woe. I yearned before
 To fly this sight—and, now I gaze on it,
 I sicken inwards.
Prometheus. To my friends, indeed, I must be a sad sight.
Chorus. And didst thou sin
 No more than so?
Prometheus. I did restrain besides
 My mortals from premeditating death.
Chorus. How didst thou medicine the plague-fear of death?
Prometheus. I set blind Hopes to inhabit in their house.
Chorus. By that gift, thou didst help thy mortals well.
Prometheus. I gave them also,—fire,
Chorus. And have they now,
 Those creatures of a day, the red-eyed fire?
Prometheus. They have! and shall learn by it many arts.
Chorus. And, truly, for such sins Zeus tortures thee,
 And will remit no anguish? Is there set
 No limit before thee to thine agony?
Prometheus. No other! only what seems good to HIM.
Chorus. And how will it seem good? what hope remains?
 Seest thou not that thou hast sinned?
 But that thou hast sinned
 It glads me not to speak of, and grieves thee—
 Then let it pass from both! and seek thyself
 Some outlet from distress.
Prometheus. It is in truth

An easy thing to stand aloof from pain
And lavish exhortation and advice
On one vexed sorely by it. I have
known

All in prevision! By my choice, my
choice,

I freely sinned—I will confess my sin—
And helping mortals, found mine own
despair!

I did not think indeed that I should pine
Beneath such pangs against such skiey
rocks,

Doomed to this drear hill and no neigh-
boring

Of any life!—but mourn not *ye* for griefs
I bear to-day!—hear rather, dropping
down

To the plain, how other woes creep on
to me,

And learn the consummation of my
doom.

Beseech you, nymphs, beseech you!—
grieve for me

Who now am grieving!—for grief walks
the earth,

And sits down at the foot of each by
turns.

Chorus. We hear the deep clash of
thy words,

Prometheus, and obey!

And I spring with a rapid foot away
From the rushing car and the holy air,

The track of birds—

And I drop to the rugged ground and
there

Await the tale of thy despair

Enter OCEANUS.

Oceanus. I reach the bourne of my
weary road,

Where I may see and answer thee,

Prometheus, in thine agony!

On the back of the quick-winged bird
I glode,

And I bridled him in

With the will of a god,

Behold thy sorrow aches in me,

Constrained by the force of kin.

Nay, though that tie were all undone,

For the life of none beneath the sun,

Would I seek a larger benison

Than I seek for thine!

And thou shalt learn my words are
truth,—

That no fair parlance of the mouth
Grows falsely out of mine!

Now give me a deed to prove my
faith,—

For no faster friend is named in breath
Than I, Oceanus, am thine.

Prometheus. Ha! what has brought
thee? Hast thou also come

To look upon my woe? How hast thou
dared

To leave the depths called after thee,
the caves

Self-hewn and self-roofed with sponta-
neous rock,

To visit Earth, the mother of my chain?
Hast come indeed to view my doom

and mourn

That I should sorrow thus? Gaze on,
and see

How I, the fast friend of your Zeus,—
how I

The erector of the empire in his hand,—
Am bent beneath that hand in this

despair!

Oceanus. Prometheus, I behold,—
and I would fain

Exhort thee, though already subtle
enough,

To a better wisdom. Titan, know thy-
self,

And take new softness to thy manners,
since

A new king rules the gods. If words
like these,

Harsh words and trenchant, thou wilt
fling abroad,

Zeus haply, though he sit so far and
high,

May hear thee do it; and, so, this wrath
of his

Which now affects thee fiercely, shall
appear

A mere child's sport at vengeance!
Wretched god,

Rather dismiss the passion which thou
hast,

And seek a change from grief. Perhaps
I seem

To address thee with old saws and out-
worn sense,—

Yet such a curse, Prometheus, surely
waits

On lips that speak too proudly!—thou,
meantime,

Art none the meeker, nor dost yield
a jot

To evil circumstance, preparing still
To swell the account of grief, with other
griefs

Than what are borne! Beseech thee,
use me then

For counsel! Do not spurn against the
pricks,—

Seeing that who reigns, reigns by cruelty
Instead of right. And now, I go from
hence,

And will endeavor if a power of mine
Can break thy fetters through. For
thee,—be calm,

And smooth thy words from passion.
Knowest thou not

Of perfect knowledge, thou who know-
est too much,

That where the tongue wags, ruin never
lags?

Prometheus. I gratulate thee who
hast shared and dared

All things with me, except their
penalty!

Enough so! leave these thoughts! It
cannot be

That thou shouldst move HIM. HE
may *not* be moved!

And *thou*, beware of sorrow on this
road.

Oceanus. Ay! ever wiser for an-
other's use

Than thine! the event, and not the
prophecy,

Attests it to me. Yet where now I rush,
Thy wisdom hath no power to drag me
back;

Because I glory—glory, to go hence
And win for thee deliverance from thy
pangs,

As a free gift from Zeus.

Prometheus. Why there, again,
I give thee gratulation and applause!

Thou lackest no good-will. But, as for
deeds,

Do nought! 'twere all done vainly!
helping nought,

Whatever thou wouldst do. Rather
take rest,

And keep thyself from evil. If I
grieve,

I do not therefore wish to multiply
The griefs of others. Verily, not so!

For still my brother's doom doth vex my
soul,—

My brother Atlas, standing in the west,
Shouldering the column of the heaven
and earth,

A difficult burden! I have also seen,
And pitied as I saw, the earth-born one,
The inhabitant of old Cilician caves,
The great war-monster of the hundred
heads,

(All taken and bowed beneath the
violent Hand,)

Typhon the fierce, who did resist the
gods,

And, hissing slaughter from his dreadful
jaws,

Flash out ferocious glory from his eyes,
As if to storm the throne of Zeus!

Whereat,

The sleepless arrow of Zeus flew straight
at him,—

The headlong bolt of thunder breathing
flame,

And struck him downward from his
eminence

Of exultation! Through the very soul,
It struck him, and his strength was
withered up

To ashes, thunder-blasted. Now, he lies
A helpless trunk supinely, at full length
Beside the strait of ocean, spurred into
By roots of Etna,—high upon whose
tops

Hephæstus sits and strikes the flashing
ore.

From thence the rivers of fire shall burst
away

Hereafter, and devour with savage jaws
The equal plains of fruitful Sicily!

Such passion he shall boil back in hot
darts

Of an insatiate fury and sough of flame,
Fallen Typhon;—howsoever struck and
charred

By Zeus's bolted thunder! But for thee,
Thou art not so unlearned as to need
My teaching—let thy knowledge save
thyself.

I quaff the full cup of a present doom,
And wait till Zeus hath quenched his
will in wrath.

Oceanus. Prometheus, art thou ignor-
ant of this,—

That words do medicine anger?

Prometheus. If the word
With seasonable softness touch the soul,
And, where the parts are ulcerous, sear
them not

By any rudeness.

Oceanus. What a noble aim
To dare as nobly—is there harm in *that*?
Dost thou discern it? Teach me.

Prometheus. I discern
Vain aspiration,—unresultive work.

Oceanus. Then suffer me to bear the
brunt of this!

Since it is profitable that one who is wise
Should seem not wise at all.

Prometheus. And such would seem
My very crime.

Oceanus. In truth thine argument
Sends me back home.

Prometheus. Lest any lament for me
Should cast thee down to hate.

Oceanus. The hate of Him,
Who sits a new king on the absolute
throne?

Prometheus. Beware of him,—lest
thine heart grieve by him.

Oceanus. Thy doom, Prometheus,
be my teacher!

Prometheus. Go!
Depart—beware!—and keep the mind
thou hast.

Oceanus. Thy words drive after, as
I rush before!

Lo! my four-footed Bird sweeps smooth
and wide

The flats of air with balanced pinions,
glad

To bend his knee at home in the ocean-
stall. [Exit OCEANUS.]

Chorus, 1st Strophe.
I moan thy fate, I moan for thee,
Prometheus! From my eyes too ten-
der,

Drop after drop incessantly,
The tears of my heart's pity render,
My cheeks wet from their fountains
free,—

Because that Zeus, the stern and cold,
Whose law is taken from his breast,
Uplifts his sceptre manifest
Over the gods of old.

1st Antistrophe.
All the land is moaning
With a murmured plaint to-day!

All the mortal nations,
Having habitations
Near the holy Asia,
Are a dirge entoning
For thine honor and thy brother's,
Once majestic beyond others
In the old belief,—
Now are groaning in the groaning
Of thy deep-voiced grief.

2d Strophe.

Mourn the maids inhabitant
Of the Colchian land,
Who with white, calm bosoms, stand
In the battle's roar—
Mourn the Scythian tribes that haunt
The verge of earth, Mæotis' shore—

2d Antistrophe.

Yea! Arabia's battle crown,
And dwellers in the beetling town
Mount Caucasus sublimely nears,—
An iron squadron, thundering down
With the sharp-prowed spears.

But one other before, have I seen to
remain,

By invincible pain
Bound and vanquished,—one Titan!—
'twas Atlas who bears,
In a curse from the gods, by that strength
of his own

Which he evermore wears,
The weight of the heaven on his shoul-
der alone,

While he sighs up the stars!
And the tides of the ocean wail bursting
their bars,—

Murmurs still the profound,—
And black Hades roars up through the
chasm of the ground,—

And the fountains of pure-running riv-
ers moan low

In a pathos of woe.

Prometheus. Beseech, you, think not
I am silent thus
Through pride or scorn! I only gnaw
my heart
With meditation, seeing myself so
wronged.
For so—their honors to these new-made
gods,

What other gave but I,—and dealt them
 out
 With distribution? Ay—but here I am
 dumb;
 For here, I should repeat your know-
 ledge to you,
 If I spake aught. List rather to the
 deeds
 I did for mortals,—how, being fools be-
 fore,
 I made them wise and true in aim of
 soul.
 And let me tell you—not as taunting
 men,
 But teaching you the intention of my
 gifts;
 How, first beholding, they beheld in
 vain,
 And hearing, heard not, but like shapes
 in dreams,
 Mixed all things wildly down the tedious
 time,
 Nor knew to build a house against the
 sun
 With wicketed sides, nor any woodcraft
 knew,
 But lived, like silly ants, beneath the
 ground
 In hollow caves unsunned. There, came
 to them
 No stedfast sign of winter, nor of spring
 Flower-perfumed, nor of summer full of
 fruit,
 But blindly and lawlessly they did all
 things,
 Until I taught them how the stars do
 rise
 And set in mystery; and devised for
 them
 Number, the inducer of philosophies,
 The synthesis of Letters, and, beside,
 The artificer of all things, Memory,
 That sweet Muse-mother. I was first
 to yoke
 The servile beasts in couples, carrying
 An heirdom of man's burdens on their
 backs!
 I joined the chariots, steeds, that love
 the bit
 They champ at—the chief pomp of gold-
 en ease.
 And none but I, originated ships,
 The seaman's chariots, wandering on the
 brine

With linen wings! And I—oh, misera-
 ble!—
 Who did devise for mortals all these arts,
 Have no device left now to save myself
 From the woe I suffer.
Chorus. Most unseemly woe
 Thou sufferest and dost stagger from
 the sense,
 Bewildered! Like a bad leech falling
 sick
 Thou art faint at soul, and canst not find
 the drugs
 Required to save thyself.
Prometheus. Harken the rest;
 And marvel further—what more arts
 and means
 I did invent,—this, greatest!—if a man
 Fell sick, there was no cure, nor escu-
 lent
 Nor chrim nor liquid, but for lack of
 drugs
 Men pined and wasted, till I showed
 them all
 Those mixtures of emollient remedies
 Whereby they might be rescued from
 disease.
 I fixed the various rules of mantic art,
 Discerned the vision from the common
 dream,
 Instructed them in vocal auguries
 Hard to interpret, and defined as plain
 The wayside omens,—flights of crook-
 clawed birds,—
 Showed which are, by their nature, for-
 tunate,
 And which not so, and what the food of
 each,
 And what the hates, affections, social
 needs,
 Of all to one another,—taught what sign
 Of visceral lightness, coloured to a shade,
 May charm the genial gods, and what
 fair spots
 Commend the lung and liver. Burn-
 ing so
 The limbs encased in fat, and the long
 chine,
 I led my mortals on to an art abstruse,
 And cleared their eyes to the image in
 the fire,
 Erst filmed in dark. Enough said now
 of this.
 For the other helps of man hid under-
 ground,

The iron and the brass, silver and gold,
Can any dare affirm he found them out
Before me? None, I know! Unless
he choose

To lie in his vaunt. In one word learn
the whole,—

That all arts came to mortals from Pro-
metheus.

Chorus. Give mortals now no inex-
pedient help,

Neglecting thine own sorrow! I have
hope still

To see thee, breaking from the fetter
here,

Stand up as strong as Zeus.

Prometheus. This ends not thus,
The oracular Fate ordains. I must be
bowed

By infinite woes and pangs, to escape
this chain.

Necessity is stronger than mine art.

Chorus. Who holds the helm of that
Necessity?

Prometheus. The threefold Fates
and the unforgetting Furies.

Chorus. Is Zeus less absolute than
these are?

Prometheus. Yea,
And therefore cannot fly what is or-
dained.

Chorus. What is ordained for Zeus,
except to be a king forever?

Prometheus. 'Tis too early yet
For thee to learn it: ask no more.

Chorus. Perhaps
Thy secret may be something holy?

Prometheus. Turn
To another matter! this, it is not time

To speak abroad, but utterly to veil
In silence. For by that same secret
kept,

I 'scape this chain's dishonor and its
woe.

Chorus, 1st Strophe.

Never, oh never,
May Zeus, the all-giver,
Wrestle down from his throne
In that might of his own,
To antagonize mine!
Nor let me delay
As I bend on my way
Toward the gods of the shrine,

Where the altar is full
Of the blood of the bull,
Near the tossing brine
Of Ocean my father.

May no sin be sped in the word that is
said,

But my vow to be rather
Consummated,

Nor evermore fail, nor evermore pine.

1st Antistrophe.

'Tis sweet to have
Life lengthened out
With hopes proved brave
By the very doubt,
Till the spirit enfold

Those manifest joys which were fore-
told!

But I thrill to behold
Thee, victim doomed,
By the countless cares
And the drear despairs,
Forever consumed.

And all because thou, who art fearless
now

Of Zeus above,
Didst overflow for mankind below,
With a free-souled, reverent love.

Ah friend, behold and see!
What's all the beauty of humanity?
Can it be fair?

What's all the strength?—is it strong?
And what hope can they bear,
These dying livers—living one day
long?

Ah seest thou not, my friend,
How feeble and slow,
And like a dream, doth go
This poor blind manhood, drifted from
its end?

And how no mortal wranglings can
confuse
The harmony of Zeus?

Prometheus, I have learnt these things
From the sorrow in thy face!
Another song did fold its wings
Upon my lips in other days,
When round the bath and round the
bed
The hymenical chant instead

I sang for thee, and smiled,—
And thou didst lead, with gifts and
vows,
Hesione, my father's child,
To be thy wedded spouse.

Io enters.

Io. What land is this? what people
is here?
And who is he that writhes, I see,
In the rock-hung chain?
Now what is the crime that hath brought
thee to pain?
And what is the land—make answer
free—
Which I wander through, in my wrong
and fear?
Ah! ah! ah me!
The gad-fly stingeth to agony!
O Earth, keep off that phantasm pale
Of earth-born Argus!—ah!—I quail
When my soul describes
The herdsman with the myriad eyes
Which seem, as he comes, one crafty
eye!
Graves hide him not, though he should
die,
But he doggeth me in my misery
From the roots of death, on high—on
high—
And along the sands of the siding deep,
All famine-worn, he follows me,
And his waxen reed doth undersound
The waters round,
And giveth a measure that giveth sleep.

Woe, woe, woe!
Where shall my weary course be
done?—
What wouldst thou with me, Saturn's
son?
And in what have I sinned, that I should
go
Thus yoked to grief by thine hand for
ever?
Ah! ah! dost vex me so,
That I madden and shiver,
Stung through with dread?
Flash the fire down, to burn me!
Heave the earth up, to cover me!
Or plunge me in the deep, with the salt
waves over me,
Where the sea-beasts may be fed!
O king, do not spurn me

In my prayer!
For this wandering everlonger, ever-
more,
Hath overworn me,—
And I know not on what shore
I may rest from my despair.

Chorus. Hearest thou what the ox-
horned maiden saith?

Prometheus. How could I choose
but hearken what she saith,
The frenzied maiden? — Inachus's
child?—

Who love-warms Zeus's heart, and now
is lashed
By Here's hate, along the unending
ways?

Io. Who taught thee to articulate
that name,—

My father's? Speak to his child,
By grief and shame defiled!
Who art thou, victim, thou—who dost
acclaim

Mine anguish in true words, on the wide
air?

And callest too by name, the curse that
came

From Here unaware,
To waste and pierce me with the mad-
ening goad.

Ah—ah—I leap
With the pang of the hungry—I bound
on the road—

I am driven by my doom—
I am overcome
By the wrath of an enemy strong and
deep!

Ate any of those who have tasted pain,
Alas!—as wretched as I?

Now tell me plain, doth aught remain
For my soul to endure beneath the sky?
Is there any help to be holpen by?

If knowledge be in thee, let it be said—
Cry aloud—cry

To the wandering, woeful maid.

Prometheus. Whatever thou wouldst
learn I will declare,—

No riddle upon my lips, but such straight
words,

As friends should use to each other when
they talk.

Thou seest Prometheus, who gave mort-
als fire.

Io. O common Help of all men,
known of all,

O miserable Prometheus,—for what cause

Dost thou endure thus?

Prometheus. I have done with wail
For my own griefs—but lately—

Io. Wilt thou not
Vouchsafe the boon to me?

Prometheus. Say which thou wilt,
For I vouchsafe all.

Io. Speak then, and reveal
Who shut thee in this chasm.

Prometheus. The will of Zeus,
The hand of his Hephæstus.

Io. And what crime
Dost expiate so?

Prometheus. I have told enough for
thee,

In so much only

Io. Nay—but show besides
The limit of my wandering, and the
time

Which yet is lacking to fulfil my grief.

Prometheus. Why, not to know
Were better than to know,
For such as thou.

Io. Beseech thee, blind me not
To that which I must suffer.

Prometheus. If I do
The reason is not that I grudge the boon.

Io. What reason, then, prevents thy
speaking out?

Prometheus. No grudging! but a
fear to break thine heart.

Io. Less care for me, I pray thee!
Certainty, I count for advantage.

Prometheus. Thou wilt have it
so,

And, therefore, I must speak. Now
hear—

Chorus. Not yet!

Give half the guerdon my way. Let us
learn

First, what the curse is that befel the
maid,—

Her own voice telling her own wasting
woes!

The sequence of that anguish shall await
The teaching of thy lips.

Prometheus. It doth behove
That thou, maid *Io*, shouldst vouchsafe
to these

The grace they pray; the more, because
they are called

Thy father's sisters; since to open out
And mourn out grief where it is possible
To draw a tear from the audience, is a
work

That pays its own price well.

Io. I cannot choose

But trust you, nymphs, and tell you all
ye ask,

In clear words—though I sob amid my
speech

In speaking of the storm-curse sent from
Zeus,

And of my beauty, from which height
it took

Its swoop on me, poor wretch! left thus
deformed,

And monstrous to your eyes. For ever-
more

Around my virgin chamber, wandering
went

The nightly visions which entreated me
With syllabled smooth sweetness.—

'Blessed maid,

Why lengthen out thy maiden hours
when fate

Permits the noblest spousal in the world?
When Zeus burns with the arrow of thy

love,

And fain would touch thy beauty.—
Maiden, thou

Despise not Zeus! depart to *Lerne's*
mead

That's green around thy father's flocks
and stalls,

Until the passion of the heavenly eye
Be quenched in sight.' Such dreams

did all night long

Constrain me—me, unhappy!—till I
dared

To tell my father how they trod the dark
With visionary steps; whereat he sent

His frequent heralds to the *Pythian*
fane,

And also to *Dodona*, and inquired

How best, by act or speech, to please
the gods,

The same returning, brought back ora-
cles

Of doubtful sense, indefinite response,
Dark to interpret; but at last there

came

To *Inachus* an answer that was clear,—
Thrown straight as any bolt, and spoken

out.

This—' he should drive me from my
home and land,
And bid me wander to the extreme
verge
Of all the earth—or, if he willed it not,
Should have a thunder with a fiery eye
Leap straight from Zeus to burn up all
his race
To the last root of it.' By which Lox-
ian word
Subdued, he drove me forth, and shut
me out,
He loth, me loth,—but Zeus's violent bit
Compelled him to the deed!—when
instantly
My body and soul were changed and
distracted,
And, horned as ye see, and spurred
along
By the fanged insect, with a maniac
leap
I rushed on to Cerchnea's limpid stream
And Lerne's fountain-water. There,
the earth born,
The herdsman Argus, most immitigable
Of wrath, did find me out, and track
me out
With countless eyes, yet staring at my
steps!—
And though an unexpected sudden
doom
Drew him from life—I, curse-tormented
still,
And driven from land to land before the
scourge
The gods hold o'er me. So, thou hast
heard the past,
And if a bitter future thou canst tell,
Speak on! I charge thee, do not flatter
me
Through pity, with false words! for, in
my mind,
Deceiving works more shame than tor-
turing doth.

Chorus.

Ah! silence here!
Nevermore, nevermore,
Would I languish for
The stranger's word
To thrill mine ear!—
Nevermore for the wrong and the woe
and the fear,

So hard to behold,
So cruel to bear,
Piercing my soul with a double-edged
sword
Of a sliding cold!
Ah fate!—ah me!—
I shudder to see
This wandering maid in her agony.

Prometheus. Grief is too quick in
thee, and fear too full!
Be patient till thou hast learnt the rest!
Chorus. Speak—teach!
To those who are sad already, it seems
sweet,
By clear foreknowledge to make perfect,
pain.
Prometheus. The boon ye asked me
first was lightly won,—
For first ye asked the story of this
maid's grief
As her own lips might tell it—now
remains
To list what other sorrows she so young
Must bear from Herè!—Inachus's child,
O thou!—Drop down thy soul my
weighty words,
And measure out the landmarks which
are set
To end thy wandering. Toward the
orient sun
First turn thy face from mine, and jour-
ney on
Along the desert flats, till thou shalt
come
Where Scythia's shepherd peoples dwell
aloft,
Perched in wheeled wagons under
woven roofs,
And twang the rapid arrow past the
bow—
Approach them not; but siding in thy
course,
The rugged shore-rocks resonant to the
sea,
Depart that country. On the left hand
dwell
The iron-workers, called the Chalybes,
Of whom beware! for certes they are
uncouth,
And nowise bland to strangers. Reach-
ing so
The stream Hybristes, (well the *scorner*
called),

Attempt no passage ;—it is hard to pass.
 Or ere thou come to Caucasus itself,
 The highest of mountains,—where the
 river leaps
 The precipice in his strength !—thou
 must toil up
 Those mountain-tops that neighbor with
 the stars,
 And tread the south way, and draw
 near, at last,
 The Amazonian host that hateth man,
 Inhabitants of Themiscyra, close
 Upon Thermodon, where the sea's rough
 jaw
 Doth gnash at Salmydessa and provide
 A cruel host to seamen, and to ships
 A stepdame. They, with reluctant
 hand,
 Shall lead thee on and on, till thou
 arrive
 Just where the ocean gates show narrow-
 est
 On the Cimmerian isthmus. Leaving
 which,
 Behoves thee swim with fortitude of
 soul
 The strait Mæotis. Ay ! and evermore
 That traverse shall be famous on men's
 lips,
 That strait, called Bosphorus, the horned
 one's road,
 So named because of thee, who so wilt
 pass
 From Europe's plain to Asia's continent.
 How think ye, nymphs ? the king of
 gods appears
 Impartial in ferocious deeds ? Behold
 The god desirous of this mortal's love
 Hath cursed her with these wanderings.
 Ah, fair child,
 Thou hast met a bitter groom for bridal
 troth !
 For all thou yet hast heard, can only
 prove
 The incomplete prelude of thy doom.
Io. Ah, ah !
Prometheus. Is't thy turn, now, to
 shriek and moan ?
 How wilt thou when thou hast heark-
 ened what remains ?
Chorus. Besides the grief thou hast
 told, can aught remain ?
Prometheus. A sea—of foredoomed
 evil worked to storm.

Io. What boots my life, then ? why
 not cast myself
 Down headlong from this miserable
 rock,
 That, dashed against the flats, I may
 redeem
 My soul from sorrow ? Better once to
 die,
 Than day by day to suffer.
Prometheus. Verily,
 It would be hard for thee to bear my
 woe,
 For whom it is appointed not to die.
 Death frees from woe : but I before me
 see
 In all my far prevision, not a bound
 To all I suffer, ere that Zeus shall fall
 From being a king.
Io. And can it ever be
 That Zeus shall fall from empire ?
Prometheus. Thou, methinks,
 Wouldst take some joy to see it.
Io. Could I choose ;
 I, who endure such pangs, now, by that
 god ?
Prometheus. Learn from me, there-
 fore, that the event shall be.
Io. By whom shall his imperial scept-
 tred hand
 Be emptied so ?
Prometheus. Himself shall spoil
 himself,
 Through his idiotic counsels.
Io. How ? declare ;
 Unless the word bring evil.
Prometheus. He shall wed—
 And in the marriage-bond be joined to
 grief.
Io. A heavenly bride—or human ?
 Speak it out,
 If it be utterable.
Prometheus. Why should I say
 which ?
 It ought not to be uttered, verily.
Io. Then
 It is his wife shall tear him from his
 throne ?
Prometheus. It is his wife shall bear
 a son to him,
 More mighty than the father.
Io. From this doom
 Hath he no refuge ?
Prometheus. None—or ere that I,
 Loosed from these fetters—

Io Yea—but who shall loose
While Zeus is adverse?

Prometheus. One who is born of
thee,—

It is ordained so.

Io. What is this thou sayest—
A son of mine shall liberate thee from
woe?

Prometheus. After ten generations,
count three more,
And find him in the third.

Io. The oracle
Remains obscure.

Prometheus. And search it not to
learn

Thine own griefs from it.

Io. Point me not to a god,
To leave me straight bereaved,

Prometheus. I am prepared
To grant thee one of two things.

Io. But which two?
Set them before me—grant me power to
choose.

Prometheus. I grant it—choose now! I
shall name aloud

What griefs remain to wound thee, or
what hand

Shall save me out of mine.

Chorus. Vouchsafe, O god,
The one grace of the twain to her who
prays,

The next to me—and turn back neither
prayer

Dishonored by denial. To herself
Recount the future wandering of her
feet—

Then point me to the looser of thy
chain—

Because I yearn to know it.

Prometheus. Since ye will,
Of absolute will, this knowledge, I will
set

No contrary against it, nor keep back
A word of all ye ask for. *Io*, first
To thee I must relate thy wandering
course

Far winding; as I tell it, write it down
In thy soul's book of memories. When
thou hast past

The reflux bound that parts two con-
tinents,

Track on the footsteps of the orient sun
In his own fire—across the roar of seas,

Fly till thou hast reached the Gorgonean
flats

Beside Cisthene—there the Phorcydes,
Three ancient maidens, live, with shape
of swan,

One tooth between them, and one com-
mon eye,

On whom the sun doth never look at all
With all his rays, nor evermore the
moon,

When she looks through the night.
A near to whom

Are the Gorgon sisters three, en clothed
with wings,

With twisted snakes for ringlets, man-
abhorred.

There is no mortal gaze in their face,
And gazing can breathe on. I speak of
such

To guard thee from their horror. Ay!
and list

Another tale of a dreadful sight! be-
ware

The Griffins, those unbarking dogs of
Zeus,

Those sharp-mouthed dogs!—and the
Arimaspian host

Of one-eyed horsemen, habiting beside
The river of Pluto that runs bright with
gold.

Approach them not, beseech thee. Pre-
sently

Thou'lt come to a distant land, a dusky
tribe

Of dwellers at the fountain of the Sun,
Whence flows the river Æthiops!—
wind along

Its banks and turn off at the cataracts,
Just as the Nile pours from the Bybline
hills,

His holy and sweet wave! his course
shall guide

Thine own to that triangular Nile-
ground

Where, *Io*, is ordained for thee and thine
A lengthened exile. Have I said, in
this,

Aught darkly or incompletely?—now
repeat

The question, make the knowledge
fuller! *Io*,

I have more leisure than I covet, here.

Chorus. If thou canst tell us aught
that's left untold

Or loosely told of her most dreary flight,
Declare it straight! but if thou hast
uttered all,
Grant us that latter grace for which we
prayed,

Remembering how we prayed it.

Prometheus. She has heard
The uttermost of her wandering. There
it ends.

But that she may be certain not to have
heard

All vainly, I will speak what she en-
dured

Ere coming hither, and invoke the past
To prove my prescience true. And so
to leave

A multitude of words, and pass at once
To the subject of thy course!—When
thou hadst gone

To those Molossian plains which sweep
around

Dodona shouldering Heaven, whereby
the fane

Of Zeus Thesprotian keepeth oracle,
And wonder, past belief, where oaks do
wave

Articulate adjurations—(ay, the same
Saluted thee in no perplexed phrase,
But clear with glory, noble wife of Zeus
That shouldst be, there, some sweetness
took thy sense!)

Thou didst rush further onward,—stung
along

The ocean-shore, — toward Rhea's
mighty bay,

And, tost back from it, was tost to it
again

In stormy evolution!—and, know well,
In coming time that hollow of the sea
Shall bear the name Ionian, and present
A monument of Io's passage through,
Unto all mortals. Be these words the
signs

Of my soul's power to look beyond the
veil

Of visible things. The rest to you and
her,

I will declare in common audience,
nymphs,

Returning thither, where my speech
brake off.

There is a town Canobus, built upon
The earth's fair margin, at the mouth of
Nile,

And on the mound washed up by it!—

Io, there
Shall Zeus give back to thee thy perfect
mind,

And only by the pressure and the touch
Of a hand not terrible; and thou to
Zeus

Shalt bear a dusky son, who shall be
called

Thence, Epaphus, Touched! That son
shall pluck the fruit

Of all that land wide-watered by the
flow

Of Nile; but after him, when counting
out

As far as the fifth full generation, then
Full fifty maidens, a fair woman-race,
Shall back to Argos turn reluctantly,
To fly the proffered nuptials of their
kin,

Their father's brothers. These being
passion-struck,

Like falcons bearing hard on flying
doves,

Shall follow, hunting at a quarry of love
They should not hunt—till envious
Heaven maintain

A curse betwixt that beauty and their
desire,

And Greece receive them, to be over-
come

In murderous woman-war, by fierce red
hands

Kept savage by the night. For every
wife

Shall slay a husband, dyeing deep in
blood

The sword of a double edge! (I wish
indeed

As fair a marriage-joy to all my foes!)

One bride alone shall fail to smite to
death

The head upon her pillow touched with
love,

Made impotent of purpose, and im-
pelled

To choose the lesser evil—shame on her
cheeks,

The blood-guilt on her hands. Which
bride shall bear

A royal race in Argos—tedious speech
Were needed to relate particulars
Of these things—'tis enough that from
her seed,

Shall spring the strong He—famous with
the bow,
Whose arm shall break my fetters off!
Behold,
My mother Themis, that old Titaness,
Delivered to me such an oracle;
But how and when, I should be long to
speak,
And thou, in hearing, wouldst not gain
at all.

Io. Eleleu, eleleu!
How the spasm and the pain
And the fire on the brain
Strike, burning me through!
How the sting of the curse, all aflame
as it flew,
Pricks me onward again!
How my heart in its terror, is spurning
my breast,
And my eyes, like the wheels of a cha-
riot, roll round,—
I am whirled from my course, to the
east, to the west,
In the whirlwind of frenzy all madly
inwound—
And my mouth is unbridled for anguish
and hate,
And my words beat in vain, in wild
storms of unrest,
On the sea of my desolate fate.

Chorus.—Strophe.

Oh! wise was he, oh, wise was he,
Who first within his spirit knew
And with his tongue declared it true,
That love comes best that comes unto
The equal of degree!
And that the poor and that the low
Should seek no love from those above
Whose souls are fluttered with the flow
Of airs about their golden height,
Or proud because they see arow
Ancestral crowns of light!

Antistrophe.

Oh! never, never, may ye, Fates,
Behold me with your awful eyes
Lift mine too fondly up the skies
Where Zeus upon the purple waits!—
Nor let me step too near—too near—
To any suitor, bright from heaven—
Because I see—because I fear
This loveless maiden vexed and laden

By this fell curse of Here,—driven
On wanderings dread and drear!

Epode.

Nay, grant an equal troth instead
Of nuptial troth to bind me by!—
It will not hurt—I shall not dread
To meet it in reply.
But let not love from those above
Revert and fix me, as I said,
With that inevitable Eye!
I have no sword to fight that fight—
I have no strength to tread that path—
I know not if my nature hath
The power to bear,—I cannot see,
Whither, from Zeus's infinite,
I have the power to flee.

Prometheus. Yet Zeus, albeit most
absolute of will
Shall turn to meekness,—such a mar-
riage-rite
He holds in preparation, which anon
Shall thrust him headlong from his
gerent seat
Adown the abysmal void, and so the
curse
His father Chronos muttered in his fall,
As he fell from his ancient throne and
cursed,
Shall be accomplished wholly—no es-
cape
From all that ruin shall the filial Zeus
Find granted to him from any of his
gods,
Unless I teach him. I, the refuge, know,
And I, the means—Now, therefore, let
him sit
And brave the imminent doom, and fix
his faith
On his supernal noises, hurtling on
With restless hand, the bolt that breathes
out fire—
For these things shall not help him—
none of them—
Nor hinder his perdition when he falls
To shame, and lower than patience.—
Such a foe
He doth himself prepare against him-
self,
A wonder of unconquerable Hate,
An organiser of sublimer fire
Than glares in lightnings, and of grander
sound

Than aught the thunder rolls,—out-
thundering it,
With power to shatter in Poseidon's fist
The trident spear, which, while it plagues
the sea,
Doth shake the shores around it. Ay,
and Zeus,
Precipitated thus, shall learn at length
The difference betwixt rule and servi-
tude.

Chorus. Thou makest threats for
Zeus of thy desires.

Prometheus. I tell you all these
things shall be fulfilled,

Even so as I desire them,

Chorus. Must we then
Look out for one shall come to master
Zeus?

Prometheus. These chains weigh
lighter than his sorrows shall.

Chorus. How art thou not afraid to
utter such words?

Prometheus. What should I fear,
who cannot die?

Chorus. But he
Can visit thee with dreader woe than
death's.

Prometheus. Why let him do it!—I
am here, prepared
For all things and their pangs.

Chorus. The wise are they
Who reverence Adrasteia.

Prometheus. Reverence thou,
Adore thou, flatter thou, whomever
reigns,

Whenever reigning—but for me, your
Zeus

Is less than nothing! Let him act and
reign

His brief hour out according to his
will—

He will not, therefore, rule the gods too
long!

But lo! I see that courier-god of Zeus,
That new-made menial of the new-
crowned king—

He doubtless comes to announce to us
something new.

HERMES enters.

Hermes. I speak to thee, the sophist,
the talker down

Of scorn by scorn,—the sinner against
gods,

The reverencer of men,—the thief of
fire,—

I speak to and adjure thee! Zeus re-
quires

Thy declaration of what marriage-rite
Thus moves thy vaunt and shall hereaf-
ter cause

His fall from empire. Do not wrap thy
speech

In riddles, but speak clearly! Never
cast

Ambiguous paths, Prometheus, for my
feet—

Since Zeus, thou may'st perceive, is
scarcely won

To mercy by such means.

Prometheus. A speech well-mouthed
In the utterance, and full minded in the
sense,

As doth besit a servant of the gods!

New gods, ye newly reign, and think
forsooth

Ye dwell in towers too high for any
dart

To carry a wound there! Have I not
stood by

While two kings fell from thence? and
shall I not

Behold the third, the same who rules
you now,

Fall, shamed to sudden ruin?—Do I
seem

To tremble and quail before your mod-
ern gods?

Far be it from me!—For thyself depart,
Re-tread thy steps in haste! To all
thou hast asked,

I answer nothing.

Hermes. Such a wind of pride
Impelled thee of yore full sail upon
these rocks.

Prometheus. I would not barter—
learn thou soothly that!—

My suffering for thy service! I main-
tain

It is a nobler thing to serve these rocks
Than live a faithful slave to father
Zeus—

Thus upon scorners I retort their scorn.

Hermes. It seems that thou dost
glory in thy despair.

Prometheus. I, glory? would my foes
did glory so,
And I stood by to see them!—naming
whom

Thou art not unremembered.

Hermes. Dost thou charge
Me also with the blame of thy mis-
chance?

Prometheus. I tell thee I loathe the
universal gods,
Who for the good I gave them rendered
back

The ill of their injustice.

Hermes. Thou art mad—
I hear thee raving, Titan, at the fever-
height.

Prometheus. If it be madness to
abhor my foes,
May I be mad!

Hermes. If thou wert prosperous,
Thou wouldst be unendurable.

Prometheus. Alas!

Hermes. Zeus knows not that word.

Prometheus. But maturing time
Doth teach all things.

Hermes. Howbeit, thou hast not
learnt

The wisdom yet, thou needest.

Prometheus. If I had,
I should not talk thus with a slave like
thee.

Hermes. No answer thou vouchsaf-
est, I believe,
To the great Sire's requirement.

Prometheus. Verily
I owe him grateful service,—and should
pay it.

Hermes. Why dost thou mock me,
Titan, as I stood
A child before thy face.

Prometheus. No child, forsooth,
But yet more foolish than a foolish
child,

If thou expect that I should answer
aught

Thy Zeus can ask. No torture from his
hand,

Nor any machination in the world
Shall force my utterance, ere he loose,
himself,

These cankerous fetters from me! For
the rest,

Let him now hurl his blanching light-
nings down,

And with his white-winged snows, and
mutterings deep

Of subterranean thunders, mix all
things;

Confound them in disorder! None of
this

Shall bend my sturdy will and make me
speak

The name of his dethroner who shall
come.

Hermes. Can this avail thee? Look
to it!

Prometheus. Long ago
It was looked forward to,—precounselled
of.

Hermes. Vain god, take righteous
courage!—dare for once

To apprehend and front thine agonies
With a just prudence!

Prometheus. Vainly dost thou chafe
My soul with exhortation, as yonder sea
Goes beating on the rock. Oh! think
no more

That I, fear-struck by Zeus to a woman's
mind,

Will supplicate him, loathed as he is
With feminine upliftings of my hands,
To break these chains! Far from me be
the thought!

Hermes. I have indeed, methinks,
said much in vain,—

For still thy heart, beneath my showers
of prayers,

Lies dry and hard!—nay, leaps like a
young horse

Who bites against the new bit in his
teeth,

And tugs and struggles against the new-
tried rein,—

Still fiercest in the feeblest thing of all,
Which sophism is,—since absolute will
disjoined

From perfect mind is worse than weak.
Behold,

Unless my words persuade thee, what a
blast

And whirlwind of inevitable woe
Must sweep persuasion through thee!

For at first
The Father will split up this jut of rock

With the great thunder and the bolted
flame,

And hide thy body where a hinge of
stone

Shall catch it like an arm!—and when
 thou hast passed
 A long black time within, thou shalt
 come out
 To front the sun, while Zeus's winged
 hound,
 The strong carnivorous eagle, shall
 wheel down
 To meet thee,—self-called to a daily
 feast,
 And set his fierce beak in thee, and tear
 off
 The long rags of thy flesh, and batten
 deep
 Upon thy dusky liver! Do not look
 For any end moreover to this curse,
 Or ere some god appear, to accept thy
 pangs
 On his own head vicarious, and descend
 With unreluctant step the darks of hell
 And gloomy abysses around 'Tartarus!
 Then ponder this!—this threat is not a
 growth
 Of vain invention: it is spoken and
 meant!
 King Zeus's mouth is impotent to lie,
 Consummating the utterance by the
 act—
 So, look to it, thou!—take heed!—and
 nevermore
 Forget good counsel, to indulge self-will!
Chorus. Our Hermes suits his rea-
 sons to the times—
 At least I think so!—since he bids thee
 drop
 Self-will for prudent counsel. Yield to
 him!
 When the wise err, their wisdom makes
 their shame.
Prometheus. Unto me the foreknow-
 er, this mandate of power
 He cries, to reveal it.
 What's strange in my fate, if I suffer
 from hate
 At the hour that I feel it?
 Let the locks of the lightning, all brist-
 ling and whitening,
 Flash, coiling me round!
 While the ether goes surging 'neath
 thunder and scourging
 Of wild winds unbound!
 Let the blast of the firmament whirl
 from its place
 The earth rooted below,

And the brine of the ocean in rapid
 emotion,
 Be it driven in the face
 Of the stars up in heaven, as they walk
 to and fro!
 Let him hurl me anon, into Tartarus—
 on—
 To the blackest degree,
 With Necessity's vortices strangling me
 down!
 But he cannot join death to a fate meant
 for me!
Hermes. Why the words that he
 speaks and the thoughts that he
 thinks,
 Are maniacal—add,
 If the Fate who hath bound him, should
 loose not the links,
 He were utterly mad.
 Then depart ye who groan with him,
 Leaving to moan with him—
 Go in haste! lest the roar of the thun-
 der anear
 Should blast you to idiocy, living and
 hearing.
Chorus. Change thy speech for an-
 other, thy thought for a new,
 If to move me and teach me, indeed
 be thy care!
 For thy words swerve so far from the
 loyal and true,
 That the thunder of Zeus seems more
 easy to bear.
 How! couldst teach me to venture such
 vileness?
 Behold!
 I choose, with this victim, this anguish
 foretold!
 I recoil from the traitor in hate and dis-
 dain,—
 And I know that the curse of the trea-
 son is worse
 Than the pang of the chain.
Hermes. Then remember, O nymphs,
 what I tell you before,
 Nor, when pierced by the arrows that
 Atè will throw you,
 Cast blame on your fate and declare
 evermore
 That Zeus thrust you on anguish he
 did not foreshow you.
 Nay, verily, nay! for ye perish anon
 For your deed—by your choice!—by
 no blindness of doubt,

No abruptness of doom!—but by madness alone,

In the great net of Atè, whence none cometh out,

Ye are wound and undone!

Prometheus. Ay! in act, now—in word, now, no more!

Earth is rocking in space!

And the thunders crash up with a roar upon roar—

And the eddy lightnings flash fires in my face,

And the whirlwinds are whirling the dust round and round—

And the blasts of the winds universal, leap free

And blow each upon each, with a passion of sound,

And æther goes mingling in storm with the sea!

Such a curse on my head, in a manifest dread,

From the hand of your Zeus has been hurtled along!

O my mother's fair glory! O, Æther, enringing,

All eyes, with the sweet common light of thy bringing.

Dost thou see how I suffer this wrong?

A LAMENT FOR ADONIS.

FROM BION.

I.

I MOURN for Adonis—Adonis is dead!

Fair Adonis is dead, and the Loves are lamenting.

Sleep, Cypris, no more on thy purple-strewed bed!

Arise, wretch stoled in black,—beat thy breast unrelenting,

And shriek to the worlds, 'Fair Adonis is dead.'

II.

I mourn for Adonis—the Loves are lamenting.

He lies on the hills, in his beauty and death,—

The white tusk of a boar has transfixed his white thigh;

Cytheria grows mad at his thin gasping breath,

While the black blood drips down on the pale ivory,

And his eye-balls lie quenched with the weight of his brows,

The rose fades from his lips, and upon them just parted

The kiss dies the goddess consents not to lose,

Though the kiss of the Dead cannot make her glad-hearted—

He knows not who kisses him dead in the dews.

III.

I mourn for Adonis—the Loves are lamenting.

Deep, deep in the thigh, is Adonis's wound;

But a deeper, is Cypris's bosom presenting—

The youth lieth dead while his dogs howl around,

And the nymphs weep aloud from the mists of the hill,

And the poor Aphrodite, with tresses unbound,

All dishevelled, unsandalled, shrieks mournful and shrill

Through the dusk of the groves. The thorns, tearing her feet,

Gather up the red flower of her blood which is holy,

Each footstep she takes; and the valleys repeat

The sharp cry she utters, and draw it out slowly.

She calls on her spouse, her Assyrian; on him

Her own youth; while the dark blood spreads over his body—

The chest taking hue from the gash in the limb,

And the bosom once ivory, turning to ruddy.

IV.

Ah, ah, Cytheria! the Loves are lamenting:

She lost her fair spouse, and so lost her fair smile—

When he lived she was fair by the whole
world's consenting,

Whose fairness is dead with him ! woe
worth the while !

All the mountains above and the oak-
lands below

Murmur, ah, ah Adonis ! the streams
overflow

Aphrodite's deep wail,—river-fountains
in pity

Weep soft in the hills ; and the flow-
ers as they blow,

Redden outward with sorrow ; while all
hear her go

With the song of her sadness, through
mountain and city

v.

Ah, ah, Cytheria ! Adonis is dead !

Fair Adonis is dead—Echo answers,
Adonis !

Who weeps not for Cypris, when bow-
ing her head,

She stares at the wound where it
gapes and astonies ?

—When, ah, ah !—she saw how the
blood ran away

And empurpled the thigh ; and, with
wild hands flung out,

Said with sobs, ' Stay, Adonis ! unhappy
one, stay,

Let me feel thee once more—let me
ring thee about

With the clasp of my arms, and press
kiss into kiss !

Wait a little, Adonis, and kiss me
again,

For the last time, beloved ; and but so
much of this

That the kiss may learn life from the
warmth of the strain !

—Till thy breath shall exude from thy
soul to my mouth ;

To my heart ; and, the love-charm I
once more receiving,

May drink thy love in it, and keep of a
truth

That one kiss in the place of Adonis
the living.

Thou fliest me, mournful one, fliest me
far,

My Adonis ; and seekest the Acheron
portal,—

To Hell's cruel King goest down with a
scar,

While I weep and live on like a
wretched immortal,

And follow no step ;—O Persephone,
take him,

My husband !—thou'rt better and
brighter than I

So all beauty flows down to thee ! I
cannot make him

Look up at my grief ; there's despair
in my cry,

Since I wail for Adonis, who died to me
. . . died to me . . .

—Then, I fear *thee* !—Art thou dead,
my Adored ?

Passion ends like a dream in the sleep
that's denied to me.—

Cypris is widowed ; the Loves seek
their lord

All the house through in vain ! Charm
of cestus has ceased

With thy clasp !—O too bold in the
hunt, past preventing ;

Ay, mad : thou so fair . . . to have strife
with a beast !—

Thus the Goddess wailed on—and the
loves are lamenting.

vi.

Ah, ah, Cytherea ! Adonis is dead.

She wept tear after tear, with the blood
which was shed ;

And both turned into flowers for the
earth's garden-close ;

Her tears, to the wind-flower,—his blood
to the rose.

vii.

I mourn for Adonis—Adonis is dead.

Weep no more in the woods, Cytherea,
thy lover !

So, well ; make a place for his corse in
thy bed,

With the purples thou sleepest in, un-
der and over.

He's fair though a corse—a fair corse . .
like a sleeper—

Lay him soft in the silks he had plea-
sure to fold,

When, beside thee at night, holy dreams
deep and deeper

Enclosed his young life on the couch
made of gold !
Love him still, poor Adonis ! cast on
him together
The crowns and the flowers ! since he
died from the place,
Why let all die with him—let the blossoms
go wither ;
Rain myrtles and olive-buds down on
his face :
Rain the myrrh down, let all that is
best fall apining,
For the myrrh of his life from thy
keeping is swept !—
—Pale he lay, thine Adonis, in purples
reclining,—
The Loves raised their voices around
him and wept.
They have shorn their bright curls off
to cast on Adonis :
One treads on his bow,—on his arrows,
another,—
One breaks up a well-feathered quiver ;
and one is
Bent low at a sandal, untying the
strings ;
And one carries the vases of gold from
the springs,
While one washes the wound ; and be-
hind them a brother
Fans down on the body sweet air
with his wings.

VIII.

Cytherea herself, now, the Loves are
lamenting.
Each torch at the door Hymenæus
blew out ;
And the marriage-wreath dropping its
leaves as repenting,
No more 'Hymen, Hymen,' is chant-
ed about,
But the *ai ai* instead—'ai alas' is begun
For Adonis, and then follows 'ai
Hymenæus !'
The Graces are weeping for Cinyris' son
Sobbing low, each to each, 'His fair
eyes cannot see us !'
Their wail strikes more shrill than the
sadder Dione's ;
The Fates mourn aloud for Adonis,
Adonis,

Deep chanting ! he hears not a word
that they say :
He *would* hear, but Persephone has
him in keeping.
—Cease moan, Cytherea—leave pomps
for to-day,
And weep new when a new year
refits thee for weeping.

BERTHA IN THE LANE.

PUT the broidery-frame away,
For my sewing is all done !
The last thread is used to-day,
And I need not join it on,
Though the clock stands at the noon
I am weary ! I have sewn,
Sweet, for thee, a wedding-gown.

Sister, help me to the bed,
And stand near me, Dearest-sweet !
Do not shrink nor be afraid,
Blushing with a sudden heat !
No one standeth in the street ?—
By God's love I go to meet,
Love I thee with love complete.

Lean thy face down ! drop it in
These two hands, that I may hold
'Twixt their palms thy cheek and chin,
Stroking back the curls of gold.
'Tis a fair, fair face, in sooth—
Larger eyes and redder mouth
Than mine were in my first youth !

Thou art younger by seven years—
Ah !—so bashful at my gaze,
That the lashes, hung with tears,
Grow too heavy to upraise ?
I would wound thee by no touch
Which thy shyness feels as such—
Dost thou mind me, Dear, so much ?

Have I not been nigh a mother
To thy sweetness—tell me, Dear ?
Have we not loved one another
Tenderly, from year to year,
Since our dying mother mild
Said with accents undefiled,
'Child, be mother to this child !'

Mother, mother, up in heaven,
 Stand up on the jasper sea,
 And be witness I have given
 All the gifts required of me,—
 Hope that blessed me, bliss that
 crowned,
 Love, that left me with a wound,
 Life itself, that turneth round !

Mother, mother, thou art kind,
 Thou art standing in the room,
 In a molten glory shrined,
 That rays off into the gloom !
 But thy smile is bright and bleak
 Like cold waves—I cannot speak ;
 I sob in it, and grow weak.

Ghostly mother, keep aloof
 One hour longer from my soul—
 For I still am thinking of
 Earth's warm-beating joy and dole :
 On my finger is a ring
 Which I still see glittering,
 When the night hides everything.

Little sister, thou art pale !
 Ah, I have a wandering brain—
 But I lose that fever-bale,
 And my thoughts grow calm again.
 Lean down closer—closer still !
 I have words thine ear to fill,—
 And would kiss thee at my will.

Dear, I heard thee in the spring,
 Thee and Robert—through the trees—
 When we all went gathering
 Boughs of May-bloom for the bees.
 Do not start so ! think instead
 How the sunshine overhead
 Seemed to trickle through the shade.

What a day it was, that day !
 Hills and vales did openly
 Seem to heave and throb away
 At the sight of the great sky.
 And the Silence, as it stood
 In the Glory's golden flood,
 Audibly did bud—and bud.

Through the winding hedgerows green,
 How we wandered, I and you,—
 With the bowery tops shut in,
 And the gates that showed the view—
 How we talked there ! thrushes soft

Sang our pauses out—or oft
 Bleatings took them, from the croft.

Till the pleasure grown too strong
 Left me muter evermore ;
 And the winding road being long,
 I walked out of sight, before,
 And so, wrapt in musings fond,
 Issued (past the wayside pond)
 On the meadow-lands beyond.

I sate down beneath the beech
 Which leans over to the lane,
 And the far sound of your speech
 Did not promise any pain ;
 And I blessed you full and free,
 With a smile stooped tenderly
 O'er the May-flowers on my knee.

But the sound grew into word
 As the speakers drew more near—
 Sweet, forgive me that I heard
 What you wished me not to hear.
 Do not weep so—do not shake—
 Oh,—I heard thee, Bertha, make
 Good true answers for my sake.

Yes, and HE too ! let him stand
 In thy thoughts, untouched by blame.
 Could he help it, if my hand
 He had claimed with hasty claim ?
 That was wrong perhaps—but then
 Such things be—and will, again !
 Women cannot judge for men.

Had he seen thee when he swore
 He would love but me alone.
 Thou wert absent,—sent before
 To our kin in Sidmouth town.
 When he saw thee who art best
 Past compare, and loveliest,
 He but judged thee as the rest.

Could we blame him with grave words,
 Thou and I, Dear, if we might ?
 Thy brown eyes have looks like birds,
 Flying straightway to the light :
 Mine are older.—Hush !—look out—
 Up the street ! Is none without ?
 How the poplar swings about !

And that hour—beneath the beech,
 When I listened in a dream,
 And he said, in his deep speech,

That he owed me all *esteem*,—
Each word swam in on my brain
With a dim, dilating pain,
Till it burst with that last strain—

I fell flooded with a Dark,
In the silence of a swoon—
When I rose, still cold and stark,
There was night,—I saw the moon :
And the stars, each in its place,
And the May-blooms on the grass,
Seemed to wonder what I was.

And I walked as if apart
From myself when I could stand—
And I pitied my own heart,
As if I held it in my hand,
Somewhat coldly,—with a sense
Of fulfilled benevolence,
And a 'Poor thing' negligence.

And I answered coldly too,
When you met me at the door ;
And I only *heard* the dew
Dripping from me to the floor :
And the flowers I bade you see.
Were too withered for the bee,—
As my life, henceforth for me.

Do not weep so—Dear—heart-warm !
It was best as it befell !
If I say he did me harm,
I speak it wild,—I am not well.
All his words were kind and good—
He esteemed me ! Only blood
Runs so faint in womanhood.

Then I always was too grave,—
Liked the saddest ballads sung,—
With that look, besides, we have
In our faces, who die young.
I had died, Dear, all the same—
Life's long, joyous, jostling game
Is too loud for my meek shame.

We are so unlike each other,
Thou and I ; that none could guess
We were children of one mother,
But for mutual tenderness.
Thou art rose-lined from the cold,
And meant, verily, to hold
Life's pure pleasures manifold.

I am pale as crocus grows
Close beside a rose-tree's root !
Whosoe'er would reach the rose,
Treads the crocus underfoot—
I, like May-bloom on thorn tree—
Thou, like merry summer-bee !
Fit, that *I* be plucked for *thee*.

Yet who plucks me ?—no one mourns—
I have lived my season out,
And now die of my own thorns
Which I could not live without.
Sweet, be merry ! How the light
Comes and goes ! If it be night,
Keep the candles in my sight.

Are there footsteps at the door ?
Look out quickly. Yea, or nay ?
Some one might be waiting for
Some last word that I might say.
Nay ? So best !—So angels would
Stand off clear from deathly road,
Not to cross the sight of God.

Colder grow my hands and feet—
When I wear the shroud I made,
Let the folds lie straight and neat,
And the rosemary be spread,
That if any friend should come,
(To see *thee*, sweet !) all the room
May be lifted out of gloom.

And, dear Bertha, let me keep
On my hand this little ring,
Which at nights, when others sleep,
I can still see glittering.
Let me wear it out of sight,
In the grave,—where it will light
All the Dark up, day and night.

On that grave, drop not a tear !
Else, though fathom-deep the place,
Through the woollen shroud I wear
I shall feel it on my face.
Rather smile there, blessed one,
Thinking of me in the sun—
Or forget me—smiling on !

Art thou near me ? nearer ? so.
Kiss me close upon the eyes,
That the earthly light may go
Sweetly as it used to rise,
When I watched the morning-gray
Strike, betwixt the hills, the way
He was sure to come that day.

So,—no more vain words be said !
 The hosannas nearer roll—
 Mother, smile now on thy Dead,
 I am death-strong in my soul.
 Mystic Dove alit on cross,
 Guide the poor bird of the snows
 Through the snow-wind above loss !

Jesus, Victim, comprehending
 Love's divine self-abnegation,
 Cleanse my love in self-spending,
 And absorb the poor libation !
 Wind my thread of life up higher,
 Up, through angels' hands of fire !—
 I aspire while I expire !

THAT DAY.

I STAND by the river where both of us
 stood,
 And there is but one shadow to darken
 the flood ;
 And the path leading to it, where both
 used to pass,
 Has the step but of one, to take dew
 from the grass,—
 One forlorn since that day.

The flowers of the margin are many to
 see,
 For none stoops at my bidding to pluck
 them for me ;
 The bird in the alder sings loudly and
 long,
 For my low sound of weeping disturbs
 not his song,
 As thy vow did that day

I stand by the river—I think of the
 vow—
 Oh, calm as the place is, vow-breaker
 be *thou* !
 I leave the flower growing—the bird,
 unproved,—
 Would I trouble *thee* rather than *them*,
 my beloved,
 And my lover that day ?

Go! be sure of my love—by that trea-
 son forgiven ;
 Of my prayers—by the blessings they
 win thee from Heaven ;

Of my grief—(guess the length of the
 sword by the sheath's)
 By the silence of life, more pathetic
 than death's !
 Go,—be clear of that day !

LIFE AND LOVE.

I.

FAST this life of mine was dying,
 Blind already and calm as death ;
 Snowflakes on her bosom lying
 Scarcely heaving with the breath.

II.

Love came by, and having known her
 In a dream of fabled lands,
 Gently stooped, and laid upon her
 Mystic chrism of holy hands .

III.

Drew his smile across her folded
 Eyelids, as the swallow dips,
 Breathed as finely as the cold did,
 Through the locking of her lips.

IV.

So, when Life looked upward, being
 Warmed and breathed on from above,
 What sight could she have for seeing,
 Evermore . . . but only LOVE ?

THE RUNAWAY SLAVE

AT PILGRIM'S POINT.

I.

I STAND on the mark beside the shore
 Of the first white pilgrim's bended
 knee,
 Where exile turned to ancestor,
 And God was thanked for liberty.
 I have run through the night, my skin is
 as dark.
 I bend my knee down on this mark . .
 I look on the sky and the sea.

II.

O pilgrim souls, I speak to you !
 I see you come out proud and slow
 From the land of the spirits pale as
 dew . .

And round me and round me you go !
 O pilgrims, I have gasped and run
 All night long from the whips of one
 Who in your names works sin and
 woe.

III.

And thus I thought that I would come
 And kneel here where ye knelt before,
 And feel your souls around me hum
 In undertone to the ocean's roar ;
 And lift my black face, my black hand,
 Here, in your names, to curse this land
 Ye blessed in freedom's evermore.

IV.

I am black, I am black ;
 And yet God made me, they say.
 But if he did so, smiling back
 He must have cast his work away
 Under the feet of his white creatures,
 With a look of scorn,—that the dusky
 features
 Might be trodden again to clay.

V.

And yet He has made dark things
 To be glad and merry as light.
 There's a little dark bird, sits and sings ;
 There's a dark stream ripples out of
 sight ;
 And the dark frogs chant in the safe
 morass,
 And the sweetest stars are made to pass
 O'er the face of the darkest night.

VI.

But *we* who are dark, we are dark !
 Ah God, we have no stars !
 About our souls in care and cark
 Our blackness shuts like prison-bars :
 The poor souls crouch so far behind,
 That never a comfort can they find
 By reaching through the prison-bars.

VII.

Indeed we live beneath the sky,
 That great smooth Hand of God
 stretched out

On all His children fatherly,
 To save them from the dread and
 doubt
 Which would be, if, from this low place,
 All opened straight up to His face
 Into the grand eternity.

VIII.

And still God's sunshine and His frost,
 They make us hot, they make us cold,
 And if we were not black and lost :
 And the beasts and birds, in wood and
 fold,
 Do fear and take us for very men !
 Could the weep-poor-will or the cat of
 the glen
 Look into my eyes and be bold ?

IX.

I am black, I am black !—
 But, once I laughed in girlish glee ;
 For one of my color stood in the track
 Where the drivers drove, and looked
 at me—
 And tender and full was the look he
 gave :
 Could a slave look so at another
 slave ?—
 I look at the sky and the sea.

X.

And from that hour our spirits grew
 As free as if unsold, unbought :
 Oh, strong enough, since we were two,
 To conquer the world we thought !
 The drivers drove us day by day ;
 We did not mind, we went one way
 And no better a freedom sought.

XI.

In the sunny ground between the canes,
 He said 'I love you' as he passed :
 When the shingle-roof rang sharp with
 the rains,
 I heard how he vowed it fast :
 While others shook he smiled in the hut
 As he carved me a bowl of the cocoa-
 nut
 Through the roar of the hurricanes.

XII.

I sang his name instead of a song ;
 Over and over I sang his name—

Upward and downward I drew it along
 My various notes; the same, the
 same!
 I sang it low, that the slave girls near
 Might never guess from aught they
 could hear,
 It was only a name—a name.

XIII.

I look on the sky and the sea—
 We were two to love, and two to
 pray,—
 Yes, two, O God, who cried to Thee,
 Though nothing didst Thou say.
 Coldly Thou sat'st behind the sun!
 And now I cry who am but one,
 Thou wilt speak to-day.—

XIV.

We were black, we were black!
 We had no claim to love and bliss:
 What marvel, if each went to wrack?
 They wrung my cold hands out of
 his,—
 They dragged him . . . where? . . . I
 crawled to touch
 His blood's mark in the dust! . . . not
 much,
 Ye pilgrim-souls, . . . though plain as
this!

XV.

Wrong followed by a deeper wrong!
 Mere grief's too good for such as I.
 So the white men brought the shame ere
 long
 To strangle the sob of my agony.
 They would not leave me for my dull
 Wet eyes!—it was too merciful
 To let me weep pure tears and die.

XVI.

I am black, I am black!
 I wore a child upon my breast . .
 An amulet that hung too slack,
 And, in my unrest, could not rest:
 Thus we went moaning, child and
 mother
 One to another, one to another,
 Until all ended for the best:

XVII.

For hark! I will tell you low . . low . .
 I am black, you see,—
 And the babe who lay on my bosom so,
 Was far too white . too white for
 me;
 As white as the ladies who scorned to
 pray
 Beside me at church but yesterday:
 Though my tears had washed a place
 for my knee.

XVIII.

My own, own child! I could not bear
 To look in his face, it was so white.
 I covered him up with a kerchief there;
 I covered his face in close and tight;
 And he moaned and struggled, as well
 might be,
 For the white child wanted his liberty—
 Ha, ha! he wanted the master right.

XIX.

He moaned and beat with his head and
 feet,
 His little feet that never grew—
 He struck them out, as it was meet,
 Against my heart to break it through.
 I might have sung and made him mild—
 But I dared not sing to the white-faced
 child
 The only song I knew.

XX.

I pulled the kerchief very close:
 He could not see the sun, I swear
 More, then, alive, than now he does
 From between the roots of the man-
 go . . . where?
 I know where. Close! a child and
 mother
 Do wrong to look at one another,
 When one is black and one is fair.

XXI.

Why, in that single glance I had
 Of my child's face, . . I tell you all,
 I saw a look that made me mad . .
 The *master's* look, that used to fall
 On my soul like his lash . or worse!—
 And so, to save it from my curse,
 I twisted it round in my shawl.

XXII.

And he moaned and trembled from foot
to head,

He shivered from head to foot ;
Till, after a time, he lay instead
Too suddenly still and mute.
I felt beside a stiffening cold . .
I dared to lift up just a fold, . .
As in lifting a leaf of the mango-fruit.

XXIII.

But *my* fruit . . ha, ha !—there had been
(I laugh to think on't at this hour ! . .)
Your fine white angels, who have seen
Nearest the secret of God's power, . .
And plucked my fruit to make them
wine,
And sucked the soul of that child of
mine,
As the humming-bird sucks the soul
of the flower.

XXIV.

Ha, ha, the trick of the angels white !
They freed the white child's spirit so.
I said not a word, but, day and night,
I carried the body to and fro ;
And it lay on my heart like a stone . .
as chill.
—The sun may shine out as much as he
will :
I am cold, though it happened a
month ago.

XXV.

From the white man's house, and the
black man's hut,
I carried the little body on.
The forest's arms did round us shut,
And silence through the trees did run :
They asked no question as I went,—
They stood too high for astonishment,—
They could see God sit on his throne.

XXVI.

My little body, kerchiefed fast,
I bore it on through the forest . . on :
And when I felt it was tired at last,
I scooped a hole beneath the moon.
Through the forest-tops the angels far,
With a white shape finger from every
star,
Did point and mock at what was done.

XXVII.

Yet when it was all done aright, . .
Earth, 'twixt me and my baby,
strewed, . .
All changed to black earth, . . nothing
white, . .
A dark child in the dark,—ensued
Some comfort, and my heart grew
young :
I sate down smiling there and sung
The song I learnt in my maidenhood.

XXVIII.

And thus we two were reconciled,
The white child and black mother,
thus :
For, as I sang it soft and wild
The same song, more melodious,
Rose from the grave whereon I sate !
It was the dead child singing that,
To join the souls of both of us.

XXIX.

I look on the sea and the sky !
Where the pilgrims' ships first an-
chored lay,
The free sun rideth gloriously ;
But the pilgrim-ghosts have slid away
Through the earliest streaks of the morn.
My face is black, but it glares with a
scorn
Which they dare not meet by day.

XXX.

Ah !—in their 'stead, their hunter sons !
Ah, ah ! they are on me—they hunt
in a ring—
Keep off ! I brave you all at once—
I throw off your eyes like snakes that
sting !
You have killed the black eagle at nest,
I think :
Did you never stand still in your tri-
umph, and shrink
From the stroke of her wounded
wing ?

XXXI.

(Man, drop that stone you dared to
lift !—)
I wish you who stand there five
abreast,

Each, for his own wife's joy and gift,
 A little corpse as safely at rest
 As mine in the mangoes!—Yes, but *she*
 May keep live babies on her knee,
 And sing the song she liketh best.

XXXII.

I am not mad : I am black.
 I see you staring in my face—
 I know you staring, shrinking back—
 Ye are born of the Washington-race :
 And this land is the free America :
 And this mark on my wrist . . (I prove
 what I say)
 Ropes tied me up here to the flog-
 ging-place.

XXXIII.

You think I shrieked then? Not a
 sound!
 I hung, as a gourd hangs in the sun.
 I only cursed them all around,
 As softly as I might have done
 My very own child!—From these sands
 Up to the mountains, lift your hands,
 O slaves, and end what I begun!

XXXIV.

Whips, curses ; those must answer those !
 For in this UNION, you have set
 Two kinds of men in adverse rows,
 Each loathing each : and all forget
 The seven wounds in Christ's body fair ;
 While He sees gaping everywhere
 Our countless wounds that pay no
 debt.

XXXV.

Our wounds are different. Your white
 men
 Are, after all, not gods indeed,
 Nor able to make Christs again
 Do good with bleeding. *We* who
 bleed
 (Stand off!) *we* help not in our loss!
We are too heavy for our cross,
 And fall and crush you and your seed.

XXXVI.

I fall, I swoon! I look at the sky :
 The clouds are breaking on my brain ;
 I am floated along as if I should die

Of liberty's exquisite pain—
 In the name of the white child waiting
 for me
 In the death-dark where we may kiss
 and agree,
 White men, I leave you all curse-free
 In my broken heart's disdain!

A CHILD'S GRAVE AT FLORENCE.

A. A. E. C.

BORN JULY, 1848. DIED NOVEMBER, 1849.

I.

OF English blood, of Tuscan birth, . .
 What country should we give her?
 Instead of any on the earth,
 The civic Heavens receive her.

II.

And here, among the English tombs,
 In Tuscan ground we lay her,
 While the blue Tuscan sky endomes
 Our English words of prayer.

III.

A little child!—how long she lived,
 By months, not years, is reckoned :
 Born in one July, she survived
 Alone to see a second.

IV.

Bright-featured, as the July sun
 Her little face still played in,
 And splendours, with her birth begun,
 Had had no time for fading.

V.

So, LILY, from those July hours,
 No wonder we should call her :
 She looked such kinship to the flowers,
 Was but a little taller.

VI.

A Tuscan Lily, only white . .
 As Dante, in abhorrence
 Of red corruption, wished aright
 The lilies of his Florence.

VII.

We could not wish her whiter, . . Her
Who perfumed with pure blossom
The house!—a lovely thing to wear
Upon a mother's bosom!

VIII.

This July creature thought perhaps
Our speech not worth assuming :
She sate upon her parents' laps,
And mimicked the gnat's humming ;

IX.

. . Said ' Father,' ' Mother !'—then left
off ;
For tongues celestial, fitter.
Her hair had grown just long enough
To catch Heaven's jasper-glitter.

X.

Babes ! Love could always hear and see
Behind the cloud that hid them ;
' Let little children come to me,
And do not thou forbid them.'

XI.

So, unforbidding we have met,
And gently here have laid her ;
Though winter is no time to get
The flowers that should o'erspread
her.

XII.

We should bring pansies quick with
spring,
Rose, violet, daffodilly,
And also, above everything,
White lilies for our Lily.

XIII.

Nay, more than flowers, this grave
exacts . .
Glad, grateful attestations
Of her sweet eyes and pretty acts,
With calm renunciations.

XIV.

Her very mother with light feet
Should leave the place too earthy,
Saying, ' The angels have thee, sweet,
Because we are not worthy.'

XV.

But winter kills the orange-buds,
The gardens in the frost are ;
And all the heart dissolves in floods,
Remembering we have lost her !

XVI.

Poor earth, poor heart!—too weak, too
weak,
To miss the July shining !
Poor heart!—what bitter words we
speak,
When God speaks of resigning !

XVII.

Sustain this heart in us that faints,
Thou God, the self-existent !
We catch up wild at parting saints,
And feel thy Heaven too distant !

XVIII.

The wind that swept them out of sin,
Has ruffled all our vesture :
On the shut door that let them in,
We beat with frantic gesture ;

XIX.

To us, us also—open straight !
The outer life is chilly—
Are *we* too, like the earth to wait
Till next year for our Lily ?

XX.

—Oh, my own baby on my knees,
My leaping, dimpled treasure,
At every word I write like these,
Clasped close, with stronger pressure !

XXI.

Too well my own heart understands . . .
At every word beats fuller . . .
My little feet, my little hands,
And hair of Lily's colour !

XXII.

—But God gives patience, Love learns
strength,
And Faith remembers promise ;
And hope itself can smile at length
On other hopes gone from us.

XXIII.

Love, strong as Death, shall conquer
Death,

Though struggle, made more glorious :
This mother stills her sobbing breath,
Renouncing, yet victorious.

XXIV.

Arms, empty of her child, she lifts,
With spirit unbereaven—

'God will not all take back His gifts :
My Lily's mine in Heaven !

XXV.

Still mine, maternal rights serene
Not given to another !
The crystal bars shine faint between
The souls of child and mother.

XXVI.

'Meanwhile,' the mother cries, 'con-
tent !

Our love was well divided ;
Its sweetness following where she went,
Its anguish stayed where I did.

XXVII.

'Well done of God, to halve the lot,
And give her all the sweetness !
To us the empty room and cot,—
To her, the Heaven's completeness :

XXVIII.

To us, this grave—to her, the rows
The mystic palm trees spring in :

To us, the silence in the house,—
To her, the choral singing !

XXIX.

'For her to gladden in God's view,—
For us to hope and bear on !
Grow, Lily, in thy garden new,
Beside the Rose of Sharon.

XXX.

'Grow fast in Heaven, sweet Lily
clipped,
In love more calm than this is,—
And may the angels dewy-lipped
Remind thee of our kisses !

XXXI.

'While none shall tell thee of our tears,
These human tears now falling ;
Till, after a few patient years,
One home shall take us all in ;

XXXII.

'Child, father, mother—who, left out ?
Not mother, and not father !—
And when, their dying couch about,
The natural mists shall gather,

XXXIII.

'Some smiling angel close shall stand
In old Correggio's fashion,
And bear a LILY in his hand,
For death's ANNUNCIATION.'

LADY GERALDINE'S COURTSHIP.

A ROMANCE OF THE AGE.

A poet writes to his friend—Place—A room in Wycombe Hall. Time—Late in the evening.

DEAR my friend and fellow-student, I would lean my spirit o'er you ;
Down the purple of this chamber, tears should scarcely run at will :
I am humbled who was humble ! Friend,—I bow my head before you !
You should lead me to my peasants !—but their faces are too still.

There's a lady—an earl's daughter ; she is proud and she is noble :
And she treads the crimson carpet, and she breathes the perfumed air ;
And a kingly blood sends glances up her princely eye to trouble,
And the shadow of a monarch's crown is softened in her hair.

She has halls among the woodlands, she has castles by the breakers,
She has farms and she has manors, she can threaten and command,
And the palpitating engines snort in steam across her acres,
As they mark upon the blasted heaven the measure of her land.

There are none of England's daughters who can show a prouder presence ;
Upon princely suitors praying, she has looked in her disdain :
She has sprung of English nobles, I was born of English peasants ;
What was I that I should love her—save for competence to pain !

I was only a poor poet, made for singing at her casement,
As the finches or the thrushes, while she thought of other things.
Oh, she walked so high above me, she appeared to my abasement,
In her lovely silken murmur, like an angel clad in wings !

Many vassals bow before her as her carriage sweeps their door-ways ;
She has blest their little children,—as a priest or queen were she.
Far too tender or too cruel far, her smile upon the poor was,
For I thought it was the same smile which she used to smile on me.

She has voters in the commons, she has lovers in the palace—
And of all the fair court-ladies, few have jewels half as fine :
Oft the prince has named her beauty, 'twixt the red wine and the chalice :
Oh, and what was I to love her ? my Beloved, my Geraldine !

Yet I could not choose but love her—I was born to poet uses—
To love all things set above me, all of good and all of fair :
Nymphs of mountain, not of valley, we are wont to call the Muses—
And in nympholeptic climbing, poets pass from mount to star.

And because I was a poet, and because the people praised me,
With their critical deduction for the modern writer's fault ;
I could sit at rich men's tables,—though the courtesies that raised me,
Still suggested clear between us the pale spectrum of the salt.

And they praised me in her presence :—‘ Will your book appear this summer ? ’
 Then returning to each other—‘ Yes, our plans are for the moors ; ’
 Then with whisper dropped behind me—‘ There he is ! the latest comer !
 Oh, she only likes his verses ! what is over, she endures.

‘ Quite low born ! self-educated ! somewhat gifted though by nature,—
 And we make a point by asking him,—of being very kind ;
 You may speak, he does not hear you ; and besides, he writes no satire,—
 All these serpents kept by charmers, leave their natural sting behind.’

I grew scornfuller, grew colder, as I stood up there among them,
 Till as frost intense will burn you, the cold scorning scorched my brow ;
 When a sudden silver speaking, gravely cadenced, overruling them,
 And a sudden silken stirring touched my inner nature through.

I looked upward and beheld her ! With a calm and regnant spirit,
 Slowly round she swept her eyelids, and said clear before them all—
 ‘ Have you such superfluous honor, sir, that able to confer it
 You will come down, Mr. Bertram, as my guest to Wycombe Hall ? ’

Here she paused,—she had been paler at the first word of her speaking ;
 But because a silence followed it, blushed somewhat, as for shame ;
 Then, as scorning her own feeling, resumed calmly—‘ I am seeking
 More distinction than these gentlemen think worthy of my claim.

‘ Nevertheless, you see, I seek it—not because I am a woman,’
 (Here her smile sprang like a fountain, and, so, overflowed her mouth)
 ‘ But because my woods in Sussex have some purple shades at gloaming
 Which are worthy of a king in state, or poet in his youth.

‘ I invite you, Mr. Bertram, to no scene for worldly speeches—
 Sir, I scarce should dare—but only where God asked the thrushes first—
 And if *you* will sing beside them, in the covert of my beeches,
 I will thank you for the woodlands, . . . for the human world at worst.’

Then she smiled around right childly, then she gazed around right queenly ;
 And I bowed—I could not answer ! Alternate light and gloom—
 While as one who quells the lions, with a steady eye serenely,
 She, with level fronting eyelids, passed out stately from the room.

Oh, the blessed woods of Sussex, I can hear them still around me,
 With their leafy tide of greenery still rippling up the wind !
 Oh, the cursed woods of Sussex ! where the hunter’s arrow found me.
 When a fair face and a tender voice had made me mad and blind !

In that ancient hall of Wycombe, thronged the numerous guests invited,
 And the lovely London ladies trod the floors with gliding feet ;
 And their voices low with fashion, not with feeling, softly freighted
 All the air about the windows, with elastic laughter sweet.

For at eve, the open windows flung their light out on the terrace,
 Which the floating orbs of curtains did with gradual shadow sweep ;
 While the swans upon the river, fed at morning by the heiress,
 Trembled downward through their snowy wings at music in their sleep.

And there evermore was music, both of instrument and singing ;
Till the finches of the shrubberies grew restless in the dark ;
But the cedars stood up motionless, each in a moonlight ringing,
And the deer, half in the glimmer, strewed the hollows of the park.

And though sometimes she would bind me with her silver-corded speeches,
To commix my words and laughter with the converse and the jest,
Oft I sat apart, and gazing on the river through the beeches,
Heard, as pure the swans swam down it, her pure voice o'erfloat the rest.

In the morning, horn of huntsman, hoof of steed, and laugh of rider,
Spread out cheery from the court-yard till we lost them in the hills ;
While herself and other ladies, and her suitors left beside her,
Went a-wandering up the gardens through the laurels and abeles.

Thus, her foot upon the new-mown grass—bareheaded—with the flowing
Of the virginal white vesture gathered closely to her throat ;
With the golden ringlets in her neck just quickened by her going,
And appearing to breathe sun for air, and doubting if to float,—

With a branch of dewy maple, which her right hand held above her,
And which trembled a green shadow in betwixt her and the skies,
As she turned her face in going, thus, she drew me on to love her,
And to worship the divineness of the smile hid in her eyes.

For her eyes alone smile constantly : her lips have serious sweetness,
And her front is calm—the dimple rarely ripples on her cheek :
But her deep blue eyessmile constantly,—as if they in discreetness
Kept the secret of a happy dream she did not care to speak.

Thus she drew me the first morning, out across into the garden :
And I walked among her noble friends and could not keep behind ;
Spake she unto all and unto me—' Behold, I am the warden
Of the song birds in these lindens, which are cages to their mind.

' But within this swarded circle, into which the lime-walk brings us—
Whence the beeches rounded greenly, stand away in reverent fear ;
I will let no music enter, saving what the fountain sings us,
Which the lilies round the basin may seem pure enough to hear.

' The live air that waves the lilies waves this slender jet of water
Like a holy thought sent feebly up from soul of fasting saint !
Whereby lies a marble Silence, sleeping ! (Lough the sculptor wrought her,)
So asleep she is forgetting to say *Hush* !—a fancy quaint !

' Mark how heavy white her eyelids ! not a dream between them lingers !
And the left hand's index droppeth from the lips upon the cheek :
And the right hand,—with the symbol rose held slack within the fingers,—
Has fallen back within the basin—yet this Silence will not speak !

' That the essential meaning growing may exceed the special symbol,
Is the thought as I conceive it : it applies more high and low.
Our true noblemen will often through right nobleness grow humble,
And assert an inward honor by denying outward show.'

'Nay, your Silence,' said I, 'truly holds her symbol rose but slackly,
Yet *she holds it*—or would scarcely be a Silence to our ken!
And your nobles wear their ermine on the outside, or walk blackly
In the presence of the social law as most ignoble men.

'Let the poets dream such dreaming! Madam, in these British Islands,
'Tis the substance that wanes ever, 'tis the symbol that exceeds;
Soon we shall have nought but symbol! and for statues like this Silence,
Shall accept the rose's image—in another case, the weed's.'

'Not so quickly!' she retorted,—'I confess where'er you go, you
Find for things, names—shows for actions, and pure gold for honor clear;
But when all is run to symbol in the Social, I will throw you
The world's book which now reads drily, and sit down with Silence here.'

Half in playfulness she spoke, I thought, and half in indignation;
Friends who listened laughed her words off while her lovers deemed her fair.
A fair woman—flushed with feeling, in her noble-lighted station
Near the statue's white reposing—and both bathed in sunny air!

With the trees round, not so distant but you heard their vernal murmur,
And beheld in light and shadow the leaves in and outward move;
And the little fountain leaping toward the sun-heart to be warmer,
And recoiling in a tremble from the too much light above.

'Tis a picture for remembrance! and thus, morning after morning,
Did I follow as she drew me by the spirit to her feet—
Why, her grayhound followed also! dogs—we both were dogs for scorning—
'To be sent back when she pleased it and her path lay through the wheat.

And thus, morning after morning, spite of vows and spite of sorrow,
Did I follow at her drawing, while the week-days passed along;
Just to feed the swans this noontide, or to see the fawns to-morrow,
Or to teach the hill-side echo some sweet Tuscan in a song.

Ay, for sometimes on the hill-side, while we sat down in the gowans,
With the forest green behind us, and its shadow cast before;
And the river running under; and across it from the rowans
A brown partridge whirring near us, till we felt the air it bore—

There, obedient to her praying, did I read aloud the poems
Made by Tuscan flutes, or instruments more various of our own;
Read the pastoral parts of Spenser—or the subtle interflowings
Found in Petrarch's sonnets—here's the book—the leaf is folded down!—

Or at times a modern volume.—Wordsworth's solemn-thoughted idyl,
Howitt's ballad-verse, or Tennyson's enchanted reverie,—
Or from Browning some 'Pomegranate,' which, if cut deep down the middle,
Shows a heart within blood-tinctured, of a veined humanity.

Or at times I read there, hoarsely, some new poem of my making—
Poets ever fail in reading their own verses to their worth,—
For the echo in you breaks upon the words which you are speaking,
And the chariot-wheels jar in the gate through which you drive them forth.

After, when we were grown tired of books, the silence round us flinging
A slow arm of sweet compression, felt with beatings at the breast,
She would break out on a sudden, in a gush of woodland singing,
Like a child's emotion in a god—a naiad tired of rest.

Oh, to see or hear her singing ! scarce I know which is divinest—
For her looks sing too—she modulates her gestures on the tune ;
And her mouth stirs with the song, like song ; and when the notes are finest,
'Tis the eyes that shoot out vocal light and seem to swell them on.

Then we talked—oh, how we talked ! her voice, so cadenced in the talking,
Made another singing—of the soul ! a music without bars—
While the leafy sounds of woodlands, humming round where we were walking,
Brought interposition worthy sweet,—as skies about the stars.

And she spake such good thoughts natural, as if she always thought them—
And had sympathies so rapid, open, free as bird on branch
Just as ready to fly east as west, whichever way besought them,
In the birchen wood a chirrup, or a cock-crow in the grange.

In her utmost rightness there is truth—and often she speaks lightly,
Has a grace in being gay, which even mournful souls approve,
For the root of some grave earnest thought is under-struck so rightly,
As to justify the foliage and the waving flowers above.

And she talked on—we talked, rather ! upon all things—substance—shadow—
Of the sheep that browsed the grasses—of the reapers in the corn—
Of the little children from the schools, seen winding through the meadow—
Of the poor rich world beyond them, still kept poorer by its scorn.

So of men, and so, of letters—books are men of higher stature,
And the only men that speak aloud for future times to hear :
So, of mankind in the abstract, which grows slowly into nature,
Yet will lift the cry of 'progress,' as it trod from sphere to sphere.

And her custom was to praise me when I said,—'The Age culls simples
With a broad clown's back turned broadly to the glory of the stars—
We are gods by our own reck'ning,—and may well shut up the temples,
And wield on, amid the incense-steam, the thunder of our cars.

'For we throw out acclamations of self-thanking, self-admiring,
With, at every mile run faster,—'O the wondrous wondrous age,'
Little thinking if we work our SOULS as nobly as our iron,
Or if angels will commend us at the goal of pilgrimage.

'Why, what *is* this patient entrance into nature's deep resources,
But the child's most gradual learning to walk upright without bane ?
When we drive out from the cloud of steam, majestic white horses,
Are we greater than the first men who led black ones by the mane ?

'If we trod the deeps of ocean, if we struck the stars in rising,
If we wrapped the globe intensely with a one hot electric breath,
'Twere but power within our *tether*—no new spirit-power comprising
And in life we were not greater men, nor bolder men in death.'

She was patient with my talking ; and I loved her—loved her certes,
 As I loved all Heavenly objects, with uplifted eyes and hands !
 As I loved pure inspirations—loved the graces, loved the virtues,
 In a Love content with writing his own name on desert sands.

Or at least I thought so purely !—thought no idiot Hope was raising
 Any crown to crown Love's silence—silent Love that sat alone—
 Out, alas ! the stag is like me—he, that tries to go on grazing
 With the great deep gun-wound in his neck, then reels with sudden moan.

It was thus I reeled ! I told you that her hand had many suitors—
 But she smiles them down imperially, as Venus did the waves—
 And with such a gracious coldness, that they cannot press their futures
 On the present of her courtesies, which yieldingly enslaves.

And this morning, as I sat alone within the inner chamber
 With the great saloon beyond it lost in pleasant thought serene—
 For I had been reading Camoens—that poem you remember,
 Which his lady's eyes are praised in, as the sweetest ever seen.

And the book lay open, and my thought flew from it, taking from it
 A vibration and impulsion to an end beyond its own,
 As the branch of a green osier, when a child would overcome it,
 Springs up freely from his clasping and goes swinging in the sun.

As I mused I heard a murmur,—it grew deep as it grew longer—
 Speakers using earnest language—' Lady Geraldine, you *would* !'
 And I heard a voice that pleaded ever on, in accents stronger
 As a sense of reason gave it power to make its rhetoric good.

Well I knew that voice—it was an earl's, of soul that matched his station—
 Soul completed into lordship—might and right read on his brow :
 Very finely courteous—far too proud to doubt his domination
 Of the common people,—he atones for grandeur by a bow.

High straight forehead, nose of eagle, cold blue eyes, of less expression
 Than resistance, coldly casting off the looks of other men,
 As steel, arrows,—inelastic lips, which seem to taste possession,
 And be cautious lest the common air should injure or distract.

For the rest, accomplished, upright—ay, and standing by his order
 With a bearing not ungraceful ; fond of art, and letters too ;
 Just a good man made a proud man,—as the sandy rocks that border
 A wild coast, by circumstances, in a regnant ebb and flow.

Thus I knew that voice—I heard it—and I could not help the hearkening :
 In the room I stood up blindly, and my burning heart within
 Seemed to seethe and fuse my senses, till they ran on all sides darkening,
 And scorched, weighed like melted metal round my feet that stood therein.

And that voice, I heard it pleading, for love's sake—for wealth, position.
 For the sake of liberal uses, and great actions to be done—
 And she interrupted gently, ' Nay, my lord, the old tradition
 Of your Normans, by some worthier hand than mine is, should be won.'

'Ah, that white hand,' he said quickly,—and in his he either drew it Or attempted—for with gravity and instance she replied—
'Nay, indeed, my lord, this talk is vain, and we had best eschew it, And pass on like friends, to other points less easy to decide.'

What he said again, I know not. It is likely that his trouble Worked his pride up to the surface, for she answered in slow scorn—
'And your lordship judges rightly. Whom I marry, shall be noble, Ay, and wealthy. I shall never blush to think how he was born.'

There, I maddened! her words stung me! Life swept through me into fever, And my soul sprang up astonished; sprang full-statured in an hour:
Know you what it is when anguish, with apocalyptic NEVER,
To a Pythian height dilates you,—and despair sublimes to power?

From my brain the soul-wings budded!—waved a flame about my body,
Whence conventions coiled to ashes: I felt self-drawn out, as man,
From amalgamate false natures; and I saw the skies grow ruddy
With the deepening feet of angels, and I knew what spirits can.

I was mad—inspired—say either! anguish worketh inspiration
Was a man or beast—perhaps so; for the tiger roars when speared;
And I walked on, step by step, along the level of my passion—
Oh my soul! and passed the doorway to her face, and never feared.

He had left her,—peradventure, when my footstep proved my coming—
But for *her*—she half arose, then sat—grew scarlet and grew pale:
Oh she trembled!—'tis so always with a worldly man or woman
In the presence of true spirits—what else *can* they do but quail?

Oh, she fluttered like a tame bird, in among its forest brothers
Far too strong for it! then drooping, bowed her face upon her hands—
And I spake out wildly, fiercely, brutal truths of her and others!
I, she planted in the desert, swathed her, windlike, with my sands.

I plucked up her social fictions, bloody-rooted though leaf-verdant,
Trod them down with words of shaming,—all the purple and the gold,
All the 'landed stakes' and lordships—all that spirits pure and ardent
Are cast out of love and honor because chancing not to hold.

'For myself I do not argue, said I, 'though I love you, madam;
But for better souls that nearer to the height of yours have trod.
And this age shows to my thinking, still more infidels to Adam,
Than directly, by profession, simple infidels to God.

'Yet, O God,' I said, 'O grave,' I said, 'O mother's heart and bosom,
With whom first and last are equal, saint and corpse and little child!
We are fools to your deductions, in these figments of heart-closing!
We are traitors to your causes, in these sympathies defiled!

'Learn more reverence, madam, not for rank or wealth—*that* needs no learning;
That comes quickly—quick as sin does, ay, and culminates to sin;
But for Adam's seed, MAN! Trust me, 'tis a clay above your scorning,
With God's image stamped upon it, and God's kindling breath within.

'What right have you, madam, gazing in your palace mirror daily,
Getting so by heart your beauty which all others must adore,
While you draw the golden ringlets down your fingers, to vow gaily
You will wed no man that's only good to God,—and nothing more ?

'Why, what right have you, made fair by that same God—the sweetest woman
Of all women He has fashioned—with your lovely spirit-face,
Which would seem too near to vanish if its smile were not so human,
And your voice of holy sweetness, turning common words to grace,

'What right *can* you have, God's other works to scorn, despise, revile them
In the gross, as mere men, broadly—not as *noble* men, forsooth,—
As mere Parias of the outer world, forbidden to assoil them
In the hope of living, dying, near that sweetnees of your mouth ?

'Have you any answer, madam ? If my spirit were less earthly,
If its instrument were gifted with a better silver string,
I would kneel down where I stand, and say—Behold me ! I am worthy
Of thy loving, for I love thee ! I am worthy as a king.

'As it is—your ermined pride, I swear, shall feel this stain upon her—
That I, poor, weak, tost with passion, scorned by me and you again,
Love you, Madam—dare to love you—to my grief and your dishonor—
To my endless desolation, and your impotent disdain !'

More mad words like these—more madness ! friend, I need not write them fuller ;
And I hear my hot soul dropping on the lines in showers of tears—
Oh, a woman ! friend, a woman ! Why, a beast had scarce been duller
Than roar bestial loud complaints against the shining of the spheres,

But at last there came a pause. I stood all vibrating with thunder
Which my soul had used. The silence drew her face up like a call.
Could you guess what word she uttered ? She looked up, as if in wonder,
With tears beaded on her lashes, and said 'Bertram !' it was all.

If she had cursed me—and she might have—or if even, with queenly bearing
Which at needs is used by women, she had risen up and said,
'Sir, you are my guest, and therefore I have given you a full hearing—
Now, beseech you, choose a name exacting somewhat less instead'—

I had borne it !—but that 'Bertram'—why it lies there on the paper
A mere word, without her accent,—and you cannot judge the weight
Of the calm which crushed my passion ! I seemed drowning in a vapor,—
And her gentleness destroyed me whom her scorn made desolate.

So, struck backward and exhausted by that inward flow of passion
Which had rushed on, sparing nothing, into forms of abstract truth,
With a logic agonizing through unseemly demonstration,
And with youth's own anguish turning grimly gray the hairs of youth,—

By the sense accursed and instant, that if even I spake wisely
I spake basely—using truth,—if what I spake indeed was true—
To avenge wrong on a woman—*her*, who sat there weighing nicely
A full manhood's worth, found guilty of such deeds as I could do !—

With such wrong and wo exhausted—what I suffered and occasioned,—
As a wild horse through a city runs with lightning in his eyes,
And then dashing at a church's cold and passive wall, impassioned,
Strikes the death into his burning brain, and blindly drops and dies—

So I fell, struck down before her ! Do you blame me friend, for weakness ?
'Twas my strength of passion slew me !—fell before her like a stone ;
Fast the dreadful world rolled from me, on its roaring wheels of blackness !
When the light came I was lying in this chamber—and alone.

Oh, of course, she charged her lacqueys to bear out the sickly burden,
And to cast it from her scornful sight—but not *beyond* the gate—
She was too kind to be cruel, and too haughty not to pardon
Such a man as I—'twere something to be level to her hate.

But for *me*—you now are conscious why, my friend, I write this letter,
How my life is read all backward, and the charm of life undone !
I shall leave her house at dawn—I would to-night, if I were better—
And I charge my soul to hold my body strengthened for the sun.

When the sun has dyed the oriel, I depart with no last gazes,
No weak moanings—one word only left in writing for her hands,
Out of reach of all derision, and some unavailing praises,
To make front against this anguish in the far and foreign lands.

Blame me not, I would not squander life in grief—I am abstemious :
I but nurse my spirit's falcon, that its wings may soar again :
There's no room for tears of weakness in the blind eyes of a Phemius :
Into work the poet kneads them,—and he does not die *till then*.

CONCLUSION.

Bertram finished the last pages, while along the silence ever
Still in hot and heavy splashes, fell the tears on every leaf :
Having ended, he leans backward in his chair, with lips that quiver
From the deep unspoken, ay, and deep unwritten thoughts of grief.

Soh ! how still the lady standeth ! 'tis a dream !—a dream of mercies !
'Twixt the purple lattice-curtains, how she standeth still and pale !
'Tis a vision, sure, of mercies, sent to soften his self-curses—
Sent to sweep a patient quiet o'er the tossing of his wail.

' Eyes,' he said, ' now throbbing through me ! are ye eyes that did undo me ?
Shining eyes, like antique jewels set in Parian statue-stone !
Underneath that calm white forehead, are ye ever burning torrid
O'er the desolate sand-desert of my heart and life undone ?'

With a murmurous stir uncertain, in the air, the purple curtain
Swelleth in and swelleth out around her motionless pale brows ;
While the gliding of the river sends a rippling noise for ever
Through the open casement whitened by the moonlight's slant repose.

Said he—' Vision of a lady ! stand there silent, stand there steady !
Now I see it plainly, plainly ; now I cannot hope or doubt—
There, the brows of mild repression—there, the lips of silent passion,
Curved like an archer's bow to send the bitter arrows out.'

Ever, evermore the while in a slow silence she kept smiling,
And approached him slowly, slowly, in a gliding measured pace ;
With her two white hands extended, as if praying one offended,
And a look of supplication, gazing earnest in his face.

Said he—' Wake me by no gesture,—sound of breath, or stir of vesture ;
Let the blessed apparition melt not yet to its divine !
No approaching—hush ! no breathing ! or my heart must swoon to death in
That too utter life thou bringest—O thou dream of Geraldine !'

Ever, evermore the while in a slow silence she kept smiling—
But the tears ran over lightly from her eyes, and tenderly ;
' Dost thou, Bertram, truly love me ? Is no woman far above me
Found more worthy of thy poet-heart than such a one as I ?'

Said he—' I would dream so ever, like the flowing of that river,
Flowing ever in a shadow greenly onward to the sea ;
So, thou vision of all sweetness—princely to a full completeness,—
Would my heart and life flow onward—deathward—through this dream of **THEE** !'

Ever, evermore the while in slow silence she kept smiling,
While the silver tears ran faster down the blushing of her cheeks ;
Then with both her hands enfolding both of his, she softly told him,
' Bertram, if I say I love thee, . . . 'tis the vision only speaks.'

Softened, quickened to adore her, on his knee he fell before her—
And she whispered low in triumph—' It shall be as I have sworn !
Very rich he is in virtues,—very noble—noble, certes ;
And I shall not blush in knowing that men call him lowly born !'

LORD WALTER'S WIFE.

'But why do you go?' said the lady, while both sate under the yew.
And her eyes were alive in their depth, as the kraken beneath the sea-blue.

'Because I fear you,' he answered; 'because you are far too fair,
And able to strangle my soul in a mesh of your gold-colored hair.'

'Oh, that,' she said 'is no reason! Such knots are quickly undone,
And too much beauty, I reckon, is nothing but too much sun.'

'Yet, farewell so,' he answered;—'the sun-stroke's fatal at times.
I value your husband, Lord Walter, whose gallop rings still from the limes.'

'Oh, that,' she said, 'is no reason. You smell a rose through a fence:
If two should smell it, what matter? who grumbles, and where's the pretence?'

'But I,' he replied, 'have promised another, when love was free,
To love her alone, alone, who alone and afar loves me.'

'Why, that, she said, 'is no reason. Love's always free, I am told.
Will you vow to be safe from the headache on Tuesday, and think it will hold?'

'But you,' he replied, 'have a daughter, a young little child, who was laid
In your lap to be pure; so I leave you: the angels would make me afraid.'

'Oh, that,' she said, 'is no reason. The angels keep out of the way;
And Dora, the child, observes nothing, although you should please me and stay.'

At which he rose up in his anger,—'Why, now, you no longer are fair!
Why, now, you no longer are fatal, but ugly and hateful, I swear.'

At which she laughed out in her scorn,—'These men! Oh, these men overnice,
Who are shocked if a color not virtuous, is frankly put on by a vice.'

Her eyes blazed upon him—'And you! You bring us your vices so near
That we smell them! You think in our presence a thought 'twould defame us to
hear!

'What reason had you, and what right,—I appeal to your soul from my life,—
To find me too fair as a woman? Why, sir, I am pure, and a wife.

'Is the day-star too fair up above you? It burns you not. Dare you imply
I brushed you more close than the star does, when Walter had set me as high?

'If a man finds a woman too fair, he means simply adapted too much
To uses unlawful and fatal. The praise!—shall I thank you for such?

'Too fair!—not unless you misuse us! and surely if, once in a while, You attain to it, straightway you call us no longer too fair, but too vile.

'A moment,—I pray your attention!—I have a poor word in my head I must utter, though womanly custom would set it down better unsaid.

'You grew, sir, pale to impertinence, once when I showed you a ring. You kissed my fan when I dropped it. No matter!—I've broken the thing.

'You did me the honor, perhaps, to be moved at my side now and then In the senses—a vice, I have heard, which is common to beasts and some men.

'Love's a virtue for heroes!—as white as the snow on high hills, And immortal as every great soul is that struggles, endures and fulfils.

'I love my Walter profoundly,—you, Maud, though you faltered a week, For the sake of . . . what was it? an eyebrow? or, still less, a mole on a cheek?

'And since, when all's said, you're too noble to stoop to the frivolous cant About crimes irresistible, virtues that swindle, betray and supplant,

'I determined to prove to yourself that, whate'er you might dream or avow, By illusion, you wanted precisely no more of me than you have now.

'There! Look me in the face!—in the face. Understand, if you can, That the eyes of such women as I am, are clean as the palm of a man.

'Drop his hand, you insult him. Avoid us for fear we should cost you a scar— You take us for harlots, I tell you, and not for the women we are.

'You wronged me: but then I considered . . . there's Walter! And so at the end, I vowed that he should not be mulcted, by me, in the hand of a friend.

'Have I hurt you indeed? We are quits then. Nay, friend of my Walter, be mine! Come, Dora, my darling, my angel, and help me to ask him to dine.'

TRANSLATIONS.

SONNETS FROM THE PORTUGUESE.

I.

I THOUGHT once how Theocritus had sung
Of the sweet years, the dear and wished-
for years,
Who each one in a gracious hand
appears
To bear a gift for mortals, old or young :
And, as I mused it in his antique tongue,
I saw in gradual vision through my
tears,
The sweet, sad years, the melancholy
years,
Those of my own life, who by turns had
flung
A shadow across me. Straightway I
was 'ware,
So weeping, how a mystic Shape did
move
Behind me, and drew me backward by
the hair ;
And a voice said in mastery while I
strove, . .
' Guess now who holds thee ? '—' Death !'
I said. But there,
The silver answer rang . . ' Not Death,
but Love.'

II.

BUT only three in all God's universe
Have heard this word thou hast said :
Himself, beside
Thee speaking and me listening ! and
replied
One of us . . *that* was God ! . . and laid
the curse
So darkly on my eyelids as to amerce
My sight from seeing thee,—that if I
had died,
The deathweights placed there, would
have signified
Less absolute exclusion. 'Nay is
worse
From God than from all others, O my
friend !

Men could not part us with their worldly
jars,
Nor the seas change us, nor the tem-
pests bend :
Our hands would touch for all the
mountain-bars :—
And, heaven being rolled between us
at the end,
We should but vow the faster for the
stars.

III.

UNLIKE are we, unlike, O princely
Heart !
Unlike our uses and our destinies.
Our ministering two angels look sur-
prise
On one another, as they strike athwart
Their wings in passing. Thou, bethink
thee, art
A guest for queens to social pageantries,
With gazes from a hundred brighter
eyes
Than tears even can make mine, to ply
thy part
Of chief musician. What hast *thou* to
do
With looking from the lattice-lights at
me,
A poor, tired, wandering singer ? . .
singing through
The dark, and leaning up a cypress
tree ?
The chrism is on thine head,—on mine,
the dew,—
And death must dig the level where
these agree.

IV.

THOU hast thy calling to some palace
floor,
Most gracious singer of high poems !
where
The dancers will break footing from the
care

Of watching 'up thy pregnant lips for
more.
And dost thou lift this house's latch too
poor
For hand of thine? and canst thou think
and bear
To let thy music drop here unaware
In folds of golden fulness at my door?
Look up and see the casement broken in,
The bats and owlets builders in the roof!
My cricket chirps against thy mandolin.
Hush! call no echo up in further proof
Of desolation! there's a voice within
That weeps. . as thou must sing. . alone
aloof.

V.

I LIFT my heavy heart up solemnly,
As once Electra her sepulchral urn,
And looking in thine eyes, I overturn
The ashes at thy feet. Behold and see
What a great heap of grief lay hid in
me,
And how the red wild sparkles dimly
burn
Through the ashen greyness. If thy
foot in scorn
Could tread them out to darkness
utterly,
It might be well perhaps. But if in-
stead
Thou wait beside me for the wind to
blow
The grey dust up, . . . those laurels on
thine head,
O My beloved, will not shield thee so,
That none of all the fires shall scorch
and shred
The hair beneath. Stand farther off
then! Go.

VI.

Go from me. Yet I feel that I shall
stand
Henceforward in thy shadow. Never-
more
Alone upon the threshold of my door
Of individual life, I shall command
The uses of my soul, nor lift my hand
Serenely in the sunshine as before.
Without the sense of that which I for-
bore, . .
Thy touch upon the palm. The widest
land

Doom takes to part us, leaves thy heart
in mine
With pulses that beat double. What I
do
And what I dream include thee, as the
wine
Must taste of its own grapes. And when
I sue
God for myself, He hears that name of
thine,
And sees within my eyes, the tears of
two.

VII.

THE face of all the world is changed, I
think,
Since first I heard the footsteps of thy
soul
Move still, oh, still, beside me; as they
stole
Betwixt me and the dreadful outer brink
Of obvious death, where I who thought
to sink
Was caught up into love and taught the
whole
Of life in a new rhythm. The cup of
dole
God gave for baptism, I am fain to drink,
And praise its sweetness, sweet, with
thee anear.
The name of country, heaven, are
changed away
For where thou art or shalt be, there or
here;
And this . . this lute and song . . loved
yesterday,
(The singing angels know) are only
dear,
Because thy name moves right in what
they say.

VIII.

WHAT can I give thee back, O liberal
And princely giver, . . who has brought
the gold
And purple of thine heart, unstained,
untold,
And laid them on the outside of the
wall
For such as I to take or leave withal,
In unexpected largesse? Am I cold,
Ungrateful, that for these most mani-
fold
High gifts, I render nothing back at all?

Not so. Not cold!—but very poor instead!
 Ask God who knows! for frequent tears
 have run
 The colours from my life, and left so
 dead
 And pale a stuff, it were not fitly done
 To give the same as pillow to thy head.
 Go farther! Let it serve to trample on.

IX.

CAN it be right to give what I can give?
 To let thee sit beneath the fall of tears
 As salt as mine, and hear the sighing
 years
 Re-sighing on my lips renunciative
 Through those infrequent smiles which
 fail to live
 For all thy adjurations? O my fears,
 That this can scarce be right! We are
 not peers,
 So to be lovers; and I own and grieve
 That givers of such gifts as mine are,
 must
 Be counted with the ungenerous. Out,
 alas!
 I will not soil thy purple with my dust,
 Nor breathe my poison on thy Venice-
 glass,
 Nor give thee any love . . which were
 unjust.
 Beloved, I only love thee! let it pass.

X.

YET, love, mere love, is beautiful in-
 deed
 And worthy of acceptation. Fire is
 bright,
 Let temple burn, or flax! An equal
 light
 Leaps in the flame from cedar-plank or
 weed.
 And love is fire: and when I say at
 need
I love thee . . mark! . . I love thee! . .
 in thy sight
 I stand transfigured, glorified aright,
 With conscience of the new rays that
 proceed
 Out of my face toward thine. There's
 nothing low
 In love, when love the lowest: meanest
 creatures

Who love God, God accepts while lov-
 ing so.
 And what I *feel*, across the inferior fea-
 tures
 Of what I *am*, doth flash itself, and
 show
 How that great work of Love enhances
 Nature's.

XI.

AND therefore if to love can be desert,
 I am not all unworthy. Cheeks as pale
 As these you see, and trembling knees
 that fail
 To bear the burden of a heavy heart,
 This weary minstrel-life that once was
 girt
 To climb Aornus, and can scarce avail
 To pipe now 'gainst the valley nightin-
 gale
 A melancholy music! . . why advert
 To these things? O Beloved, it is plain
 I am not of thy worth nor for thy place:
 And yet because I love thee, I obtain
 From that same love this vindicating
 grace,
 To live on still in love and yet in vain, . .
 To bless thee yet renounce thee to thy
 face.

XII.

INDEED this very love which is my
 boast,
 And which, when rising up from breast
 to brow,
 Doth crown me with a ruby large enow
 To draw men's eyes and prove the inner
 cost, . .
 This love even, all my worth, to the
 uttermost,
 I should not love withal, unless that thou
 Hadst set me an example, shown me
 how,
 When first thine earnest eyes with mine
 were crossed,
 And love called love. And thus, I can-
 not speak
 Of love even, as a good thing of my
 own.
 Thy soul hath snatched up mine all faint
 and weak,
 And placed it by thee on a golden
 throne,—

And that I love, (O soul, we must be
meek !)
Is by thee only, whom I love alone.

XIII.

AND wilt thou have me fashion into
speech
The love I bear thee, finding words
enough,
And hold the torch out, while the winds
are rough,
Between our faces to cast light on
each ?—

I drop it at thy feet. I cannot teach
My hand to hold my spirit so far off
From myself . . me . . that I should
bring thee proof

In words, of love hid in me out of reach.
Nay, let the silence of my womanhood
Commend my woman-love to thy be-
lief,—

Seeing that I stand unwon, however
wooded,

And rend the garment of my life in
brief,

By a most dauntless, voiceless fortitude,
Lest one touch of this heart convey its
grief.

XIV.

IF thou must love me, let it be for
nought

Except for love's sake only. Do not
say

'I love her for her smile . . her look . .
her way

Of speaking gently, . . for a trick of
thought

That falls in well with mine, and certes
brought

A sense of pleasant ease on such a
day'—

For these things in themselves, Beloved,
may

Be changed, or change for thee,—and
love so wrought,

May be unwrought so. Neither love
me for

Thine own dear pity's wiping my cheeks
dry ;

A creature might forget to weep, who
bore

Thy comfort long, and lose thy love
thereby.

But love me for love's sake, that ever-
more
Thou may'st love on through love's eter-
nity.

XV.

ACCUSE me not, beseech thee, that I
wear

Too calm and sad a face in front of
thine ;

For we two look two ways, and cannot
shine

With the same sunlight on our brow
and hair.

On me thou lookest with no doubting
care,

As on a bee shut in a crystalline,—
For sorrow hath shut me safe in love's
divine,

And to spread wing and fly in the outer
air

Were most impossible failure, if I strove
To fail so. But I look on thee . . on
thee . .

Beholding, besides love, the end of love,
Hearing oblivion beyond memory . . .

As one who sits and gazes from above,
Over the rivers to the bitter sea.

XVI.

AND yet, because thou overcomest so,
Because thou art more noble and like a
king,

Thou canst prevail against my fears and
fling

Thy purple round me, till my heart
shall grow

Too close against thine heart, henceforth
to know

How it shook when alone. Why, con-
quering

May prove as lordly and complete a
thing

In lifting upward as in crushing low :
And as a vanquished soldier yields his
sword

To one who lifts him from the bloody
earth,—

Even so, Beloved, I at last record,
Here ends my strife. If *thou* invite me
forth,

I rise above abasement at the word.
Make thy love larger to enlarge my
worth.

XVII.

My poet, thou canst touch on all the
 notes
 God set between His After and Before,
 And strike up and strike off the general
 roar
 Of the rushing worlds, a melody that
 floats
 In a serene air purely. Antidotes
 Of medicated music, answering for
 Mankind's forlornest uses, thou canst
 pour
 From thence into their ears. God's will
 devotes
 Thine to such ends and mine to wait on
 thine!
 How, Dearest, wilt thou have me for
 most use?
 A hope, to sing by gladly? . . or a fine
 Sad memory, with thy songs to inter-
 fuse?
 A shade, in which to sing . . . of palm
 or pine?
 A grave, on which to rest from singing?
 . . Choose.

XVIII.

I NEVER gave a lock of hair away
 To a man, Dearest, except this to thee,
 Which now upon my fingers thought-
 fully
 I ring out to the full brown length and
 say
 'Take it.' My day of youth went yes-
 terday;
 My hair no longer bounds to my foot's
 glee,
 Nor plant I it from rose or myrtle-tree,
 As girls do, any more. It only may
 Now shade on two pale cheeks, the
 mark of tears,
 Taught drooping from the head that
 hangs aside
 Through sorrow's trick. I thought the
 funeral shears
 Would take this first; but Love is
 justified:
 Take it thou, . . finding pure, from all
 those years,
 The kiss my mother left here when she
 died.

XIX.

THE soul's Rialto hath its merchandise;
 I barter curl for curl upon that mart;
 And from my poet's forehead to my
 heart,
 Receive this lock which outweighs ar-
 gosies,—
 As purple black, as erst to Pindar's eyes
 The dim purpureal tresses gloomed
 athwart
 The nine white Muse-brows. For this
 counterpart,
 The bay-crown's shade, Beloved, I
 surmise,
 Still lingers on thy curl, it is so black!
 Thus, with a fillet of smooth-kissing
 breath,
 I tie the shadow safe from gliding back,
 And lay the gift where nothing hin-
 dereth,
 Here on my heart as on thy brow, to
 lack
 No natural heat till mine grows cold in
 death.

XX.

BELOVED, my Beloved, when I think
 That thou wast in the world a year ago,
 What time I sate alone here in the snow
 And saw no footprint, heard the silence
 sink
 No moment at thy voice, . . but link by
 link
 Went counting all my chains as if that so
 They never could fall off at any blow
 Struck by thy possible hand . . . why,
 thus I drink
 Of life's great cup of wonder. Won-
 derful,
 Never to feel thee thrill the day or night
 With personal act or speech,—nor ever
 cull
 Some prescience of thee with the blos-
 soms white
 Thou sawest growing! Atheists are as
 dull,
 Who cannot guess God's presence out of
 sight.

XXI.

SAY over again and yet once over again
 That thou dost love me. Though the
 word repeated

Should seem 'a cuckoo-song,' as thou
 dost treat it,
 Remember never to the hill or plain,
 Valley and wood, without her cuckoo-
 strain;
 Comes the fresh Spring in all her green
 completed!
 Beloved, I, amid the darkness greeted
 By a doubtful spirit-voice, in that doubt's
 pain
 Cry . . speak once more . . thou lovest!
 Who can fear
 Too many stars, though each in heaven
 shall roll—
 Too many flowers, though each shall
 crown the year?
 Say thou dost love me, love me, love me
 —toll
 The silver iterance!—only minding,
 Dear,
 To love me also in silence, with thy soul.

XXII.

WHEN our two souls stand up erect and
 strong,
 Face to face, drawing nigh and nigher,
 Until the lengthening wings break into
 fire
 At either curvèd point,—What bitter
 wrong
 Can the earth do to us, that we should
 not long
 Be here contented? Think. In mount-
 ing higher,
 The angels would press on us, and aspire
 To drop some golden orb of perfect song
 Into our deep, dear silence. Let us stay
 Rather on earth, Beloved,—where the
 unfit
 Contrarious moods of men recoil away
 And isolate pure spirits, and permit
 A place to stand and love in for a day,
 With darkness and the death-hour
 rounding it.

XXIII.

Is it indeed so? If I lay here dead,
 Would'st thou miss any life in losing
 mine,
 And would the sun for thee more coldly
 shine,
 Because of grave-damps falling round
 my head?

I marvelled, my Beloved, when I read
 Thy thought so in the letter. I am
 thine—
 But . . so much to thee? Can I pour
 thy wine
 While my hands tremble? Then my
 soul, instead
 Of dreams of death, resumes life's lower
 range!
 Then, love me, Love! look on me . .
 breathe on me!
 As brighter ladies do not count it strange,
 For love, to give up acres and degree,
 I yield the grave for thy sake, and
 exchange
 My near sweet view of Heaven, for
 earth with thee!

XXIV.

LET the world's sharpness like a clasp-
 ing
 knife
 Shut in upon itself and do no harm
 In this close hand of Love, now soft and
 warm;
 And let us hear no sound of human strife
 After the click of the shutting. Life to
 life—
 I lean upon thee, Dear, without alarm,
 And feel as safe as guarded by a charm,
 Against the stab of worldlings who if rife
 Are weak to injure. Very whitely still
 The lilies of our lives may reassure
 Their blossoms from their roots! acces-
 sible
 Alone to heavenly dewes that drop not
 fewer;
 Growing straight, out of man's reach, on
 the hill.
 God only, who made us rich, can make
 us poor.

XXV.

A HEAVY heart, Beloved, have I borne
 From year to year until I saw thy face,
 And sorrow after sorrow took the place
 Of all those natural joys as lightly worn
 As the stringed pearls . . each lifted in
 its turn
 By a beating heart at dance-time. Hopes
 apace
 Were changed to long despairs, . . till
 God's own grace
 Could scarcely lift above the world
 forlorn

My heavy heart. Then *thou* didst bid
me bring
And let it drop adown thy calmly great
Deep being! Fast it sinketh, as a thing
Which its own nature doth precipitate,
While thine doth close above it medi-
ating
Betwixt the stars and the unaccom-
plished fate.

XXVI.

I LIVED with visions for my company
Instead of men and women, years ago,
And found them gentle mates, nor
thought to know
A sweeter music than they played to
me.
But soon their trailing purple was not
free
Of this world's dust,—their lutes did
silent grow,
And I myself grew faint and blind be-
low
Their vanishing eyes. Then THOU didst
come . . . to *be*,
Beloved, what they *seemed*. Their
shining fronts,
Their songs, their splendours . . . (better,
yet the same,
As water-river hallowed into fountains . . .)
Met in thee, and from out thee over-
came
My soul with satisfaction of all wants—
Because God's gifts put man's best
dreams to shame.

XXVII.

My own Beloved, who hast lifted me
From this drear flat of earth where I was
thrown,
And in betwixt the languid ringlets,
blown
A life-breath, till the forehead hopefully
Shines out again, as all the angels see,
Before thy saving kiss! My own, my
own,
Who camest to me when the world was
gone,
And I who only looked for God, found
thee!
I find thee: I am safe, and strong, and
glad,
As one who stands in dewless asphodel

Looks backward on the tedious time he
had
In the upper life . . . so I, with bosom-
swell,
Make witness here between the good
and bad,
That Love, as strong as Death, retrieves
as well.

XXVIII.

My letters all dead paper, . . . mute and
white!—
And yet they seem alive and quiver-
ing
Against my tremulous hands which
loose the string
And let them drop down on my knee to-
night.
This said, . . . He wished to have me in
his sight
Once, as a friend: this fixed a day in
spring
To come and touch my hand . . . a sim-
ple thing,
Yet I wept for it!—this, . . . the paper's
light . . .
Said, *Dear, I love thee*: and I sank and
quailed
As if God's future thundered on my
past:
This said *I am thine*—and so its ink has
paled
With lying at my heart that beat too
fast:
And this . . . O Love, thy words have
ill availed,
If, what this said, I dared repeat at last!

XXIX.

I THINK of thee!—my thoughts do twine
and bud
About thee, as wild vines about a tree,
Put out broad leaves, and soon there's
nought to see
Except the straggling green which hides
the wood.
Yet, O my palm-tree, be it understood
I will not have my thoughts instead of
thee
Who art dearer, better! Rather in-
stantly
Renew thy presence! As a strong tree
should

Rustle thy boughs and set thy trunk all bare,
 And let these bands of greenery which
 insphere thee,
 Drop heavily down, . . burst, shattered,
 everywhere!
 Because, in this deep joy to see and hear
 thee
 And breathe within thy shadow a new
 air,
 I do not think of thee—I am too near
 thee.

XXX.

I SEE thy image through my tears to-
 night,
 And yet to-day I saw thee smiling.
 How
 Refer the cause?—Beloved, is it thou
 Or I? Who makes me sad? The
 acolyte
 Amid the chanted joy and thankful rite,
 May so fall flat with pale insensate brow,
 On the altar-stair. I hear thy voice
 and vow
 Perplexed, uncertain, since thou'rt out
 of sight,
 As he, in his swooning ears, the choir's
 amen!
 Beloved, dost thou love? or did I see all
 The glory as I dreamed, and fainted
 when
 Too vehement light dilated my ideal
 For my soul's eyes? Will that light
 come again,
 As now these tears come . . . falling hot
 and real?

XXXI.

THOU comest! all is said without a
 word.
 I sit beneath thy looks, as children do
 In the noon-sun, with souls that tremble
 through
 Their happy eyelids from an unaverred
 Yet prodigal inward joy, Behold, I
 erred
 In that last doubt! and yet I cannot rue
 The sin most, but the occasion . . . that
 we two
 Should for a moment stand unministered
 By a mutual presence. Ah, keep near
 and close,

Thou dovelike help! and, when my
 fears would rise,
 With thy broad heart serenely interpose!
 Brood down with thy divine sufficien-
 cies
 These thoughts which tremble when
 bereft of those,
 Like callow birds left desert to the skies.

XXXII.

THE first time that the sun rose on thine
 oath
 To love me, I looked forward to the
 moon
 To slacken all those bonds which seemed
 too soon
 And quickly tied to make a lasting
 troth.
 Quick-loving hearts, I thought, may
 quickly loathe;
 And, looking on myself, I seemed not
 one
 For such man's love!—more like an out
 of tune
 Worn viol, a good singer would be
 wroth
 To spoil his song with, and which,
 snatched in haste,
 Is laid down at the first ill-sounding
 note.
 I did not wrong myself so, but I placed
 A wrong on *thee*. For perfect strains
 may float
 'Neath master-hands, from instruments
 defaced,—
 And great souls, at one stroke, may do
 and doat.

XXXIII.

YES, call me by my pet-name! let me
 hear
 The name I used to run at, when a child,
 From innocent play, and leave the cow-
 slips piled,
 To glance up in some face that proved
 me dear
 With the look of its eyes. I miss the
 clear
 Fond voices, which, being drawn and
 reconciled
 Into the music of Heaven's undefiled,
 Call me no longer. Silence on the bier,
 While I call God . . . call God!—So let
 thy mouth

Be heir to those who are now exan-
imate :

Gather the north flowers to complete
the south,

And catch the early love up in the late !
Yes, call me by that name,—and I, in
truth,

With the same heart, will answer and
not wait.

XXXIV.

With the same heart, I said, I'll answer
thee

As those, when thou shalt call me by
my name—

Lo, the vain promise ! Is the same, the
same,

Perplexed and ruffled by life's strategy ?
When called before, I told how hastily

I dropped my flowers, or brake off from
a game,

To run and answer with the smile that
came

At play last moment, and went on with
me

Through my obedience. When I answer
now,

I drop a grave thought ;—break from
solitude :—

Yet still my heart goes to thee . . . pon-
der how . . .

Not as to a single good but all my good !
Lay thy hand on it, best one, and allow
That no child's foot could run fast as
this blood.

XXXV.

If I leave all for thee, wilt thou exchange
And *be* all to me ? Shall I never miss
Home-talk and blessing, and the com-
mon kiss

That comes to each in turn, nor count it
strange.

When I look up to drop on a new range
Of walls and floors . . . another home
than this ?

Nay, wilt thou fill that place by me
which is

Filled by dead eyes too tender to know
change ?

That's hardest ! If to conquer love, has
tried,

To conquer grief tries more . . . as all
things prove,

For grief indeed is love and grief be-
side.

Alas, I have grieved so I am hard to
love—

Yet love me—wilt thou ? Open thine
heart wide,

And fold within, the wet wings of thy
dove.

XXXVI.

WHEN we first met and lovèd, I did not
build

Upon the event with marble. Could it
mean

To last, a love set pendulous between
Sorrow and sorrow ? Nay, I rather
thrilled,

Distrusting every light that seemed to
gild

The onward path, and feared to over-
lean

A finger even. And though I have
grown serene

And strong since then, I think that God
has willed

A still renewable fear . . . O love, O
troth . . .

Lest these encclasped hands should never
hold,

This mutual kiss drop down between us
both

As an unowned thing, once the lips being
cold,

And Love be false ! if *he*, to keep one
oath,

Must lose one joy by his life's star fore-
told.

XXXVII.

PARDON, oh, pardon, that my soul should
make

Of all that strong divineness which I
know

For thine aid thee, an image only so
Formed of the sand, and fit to shift and
break.

It is that distant years which did not
take

Thy sovranity, recoiling with a blow,
Have forced my swimming brain to un-
dergo

Their doubt and dread, and blindly to
forsake

Thy purity of likeness, and distort

Thy worthiest love to a worthless counterfeit.
 As if a shipwrecked Pagan, safe in port,
 His guardian sea-god to commemorate,
 Should set a sculptured porpoise, gills
 a-snort,
 And vibrant tail, within the temple-gate.

XXXVIII.

FIRST time he kissed me, he but only
 kissed
 The fingers of this hand wherewith I
 write,
 And ever since it grew more clean and
 white, . . .
 Slow to world-greetings . . quick with
 its 'Oh, list,'
 When the angels speak. A ring of
 amethyst
 I could not wear here plainer to my
 sight,
 Than that first kiss. The second passed
 in height
 The first, and sought the forehead, and
 half missed,
 Half falling on the hair. O beyond
 meed!
 That was the chrism of love with love's
 own crown,
 With sanctifying sweetness, did pre-
 cede.
 The third upon my lips was folded down
 In perfect, purple state! since when,
 indeed,
 I have been proud and said, 'My Love,
 my own.'

XXXIX.

BECAUSE thou hast the power and own'st
 the grace
 To look through and behind this mask
 of me,
 (Against which years have beat thus
 blanchingly
 With their rains!) and beheld my soul's
 true face,
 The dim and dreary witness of life's
 race :—
 Because thou hast the faith and love to
 see,
 Through that same soul's distracting
 lethargy,

The patient angel waiting for his place
 In the new Heavens: because nor sin
 nor woe,
 Nor God's infliction, nor death's neigh-
 borhood,
 Nor all which others viewing, turn to
 go, . . .
 Nor all which makes me tired of all,
 self-viewed, . . .
 Nothing repels thee, . . Dearest, teach
 me so
 To pour out gratitude, as thou dost,
 good!

XL.

OH, yes! they love through all this
 world of ours!
 I will not gainsay love, called love for-
 sooth.
 I have heard love talked in my early
 youth,
 And since, not so long back but that the
 flowers
 Then gathered, smell still. Mussul-
 mans and Giaours
 Throw kerchiefs at a smile, and have no
 ruth
 For any weeping. Polypheme's white
 tooth
 Slips on the nut, if after frequent show-
 ers
 The shell is oversmooth; and not so
 much
 Will turn the thing called love, aside to
 hate,
 Or else to oblivion. But thou art not
 such
 A lover, my Beloved! thou canst wait
 Through sorrow and sickness, to bring
 souls to touch,
 And think it soon when others cry 'Too
 late.'

XLI.

I THANK all who have loved me in their
 hearts,
 With thanks and love from mine. Deep
 thanks to all
 Who paused a little near the prison-wall,
 To hear my music in its louder parts,
 Ere they went onward, each one to the
 mart's
 Or temple's occupations, beyond all.

But thou, who in my voice's sink and fall,
 When the sob took it, thy divinest Art's
 Own instrument didst drop down at thy
 foot,
 To hearken what I said between my
 tears, . .
 Instruct me how to thank thee!—Oh, to
 shoot
 My soul's full meaning into future years,
 That *they* should lend it utterance, and
 salute
 Love that endures! with Life that dis-
 appears!

XLII.

How do I love thee? Let me count
 the ways.
 I love thee to the depth and breadth
 and height
 My soul can reach, when feeling out of
 sight
 For the ends of Being and Ideal Grace.
 I love thee to the level of everyday's
 Most quiet need, by sun and candlelight.
 I love thee freely, as men strive for
 Right;
 I love thee purely, as they turn from
 Praise;
 I love thee with the passion put to use
 In my old griefs, and with my child-
 hood's faith;
 I love thee with a love I seemed to lose
 With my lost saints,—I love thee with
 the breath,
 Smiles, tears, of all my life!—and, if
 God choose,
 I shall but love thee better after death.

XLII.

BELoved, thou hast brought me many
 flowers
 Plucked in the garden, all the summer
 through
 And winter, and it seemed as if they
 grew
 In this close room, nor missed the sun
 and showers.
 So, in the like name of that love of ours,
 Take back these thoughts which here
 unfolded too,

And which on warm and cold days I
 withdrew
 From my heart's ground. Indeed, those
 beds and bowers
 Be overgrown with bitter weeds and rue,
 And wait thy weeding: yet here's
 eglantine,
 Here's ivy!—take them, as I used to do
 Thy flowers, and keep them where they
 shall not pine;
 Instruct thine eyes to keep their colours
 true,
 And tell thy soul, their roots are left in
 mine.

XLIV.

My future will not copy fair my past.
 I wrote that once; and thinking at my
 side
 My ministering life-angel justified
 The word by his appealing look upcast
 To the white throne of God, I turned at
 last,
 And there, instead, saw *thee*; not un-
 allied
 To angels in thy soul! Then I, long
 tried
 By natural ills, received the comfort fast,
 While budding at thy sight, my pilgrim's
 staff
 Gave out green leaves with morning
 dews impearled.
 —I seek no copy now of life's first half!
 Leave here the pages with long musing
 curled,
 And write me new my future's epigraph,
 New angel mine, unhop'd for in the
 world!

PARAPHRASES ON HEINE.

ROME, 1860.

I.

I.

OUT of my own great woe
 I make my little songs,
 Which rustle their feathers in throngs,
 And beat on her heart even so.

II.

They found their way, for their part,
Ye come again and complain,
Complain, and are not fain
To say what they saw in her heart.

II.

I.

ART thou indeed so adverse ?
Art thou so changed indeed ?
Against the woman who wrongs me
I cry to the world in my need.

II.

O recreant lips unthankful,
How could ye speak evil, say,
Of the man who so well has kissed you
On many a fortunate day ?

III.

I.

MY child, we were two children,
Small, merry by childhood's law ;
We used to crawl to the hen-house,
And hide ourselves in the straw,

II.

We crowed like cocks, and whenever
The passers near us drew—
Cock-a-doodle ! they thought
'Twas a real cock that crew.

III.

The boxes about our courtyard
We carpeted to our mind,
And lived there both together—
Kept house in a noble kind.

IV.

The neighbor's old cat often
Came to pay us a visit ;

We made her a bow and curtsey,
Each with a compliment in it,

V.

After her health we asked,
Our care and regard to evince—
(We have made the very same speeches
To many an old cat since).

VI.

We also sate and wisely
Discoursed, as old folks do,
Complaining how all went better
In those good times we knew,—

VII.

How love and truth and believing
Had left the world to itself,
And how so dear was the coffee,
And how so rare was the pelf.

VIII.

The children's games are over,
The rest is over with youth—
The world, the good games, the good
times,
The belief, and the love, and the truth.

IV.

I.

THOU lovest me not, thou lovest me not !
'Tis scarcely worth a sigh :
Let me look in thy face, and no king in
his place
Is a gladder man than I.

II.

Thou hatest me well, thou hatest me
well—
Thy little red mouth has told :
Let it reach me a kiss, and, however it is,
My child, I am well consoled.

V.

I.

My own sweet Love, if thou in the
grave,
The darksome grave, wilt be,
Then will I go down by the side, and
crave
Love-room for thee and me.

II.

I kiss and caress and press thee wild,
Thou still, thou cold, thou white!
I wail, I tremble, and weeping mild,
Turn to a corpse at the right.

III.

The Dead stand up, the midnight calls
They dance in airy swarms—
We two keep still where the grave-
shade falls,
And I lie on in thine arms.

IV.

The Dead stand up, the Judgment-day
Bids such to weal or woe—
But nought shall trouble us where we
stay
Embraced and embracing below.

VI.

I.

THE years they come and go,
The races drop in the grave,
Yet never the love doth so,
Which in my heart I have.

II.

Could I see thee but once, one day
And sink down so on my knee,
And die in thy sight while I say,
'Lady, I love but thee!'

THESE Translations were only intended, many years ago, to accompany and explain certain Engravings after ancient Gems, in the projected work of a friend, by whose kindness they are now recovered; but as two of the original series (the "Adonis:" of Bion, and "Song to the Rose," from Achilles Tatius) had already been included in these poems, it is presumed that the remainder may not improperly appear. A single recent version is added.

PARAPHRASE ON THEOCRITUS.

THE CYCLOPS.

(Idyl XI.)

AND so an easier life our Cyclops drew,
The ancient Polyphemus, who in
youth
Loved Galatea, while the manhood grew
Adown his cheeks and darkened round
his mouth.
No jot he cared for apples, olives, roses;
Love made him mad: the whole
world was neglected,
The very sheep went backward to their
closes
From out the fair green pastures, self-
directed.
And singing Galatea, thus, he wore
The sunrise down along the weedy
shore,
And pined alone, and felt the cruel
wound
Beneath his heart, which Cypris's
arrow bore,
With a deep pang; but, so, the cure was
found;
And sitting on a lofty rock he cast
His eyes upon the sea, and sang at
last;—
'O whitest Galatea, can it be
That thou shouldst spurn me off who
love thee so?
More white than curds, my girl, thou
art to see,
More meek than lambs, more full of
leaping glee
Than kids, and brighter than the
early glow

On grapes that swell to ripen,—sour like thee!

Thou comest to me with the fragrant sleep,

And with the fragrant sleep thou goest from me;

Thou fliest . . . fliest, as a frightened sheep
Flies the gray wolf!—yet Love did overcome me,

So long;—I loved thee, maiden, first of all

When down the hills (my mother fast beside thee)

I saw thee stray to pluck the summer-fall

Of hyacinth bells, and went myself to guide thee:

And since my eyes have seen thee, they can leave thee

No more, from that day's light! But thou . . . by Zeus,

Thou wilt not care for *that* to let it grieve thee!

I know thee, fair one, why thou springest loose

From my arm round thee. Why? I tell thee, Dear!

One shaggy eyebrow draws its smudging road

Straight through my ample front, from ear to ear,—

One eye rolls underneath; and yawning, broad

Flat nostrils feel the bulging lips too near.

Yet . . . ho, ho!—*I*,—whatever I appear,—

Do feed a thousand oxen! When I have done,

I milk the cows, and drink the milk that's best!

I lack no cheese, while summer keeps the sun;

And after, in the cold, it's ready prest!

And then, I know to sing, as there is none

Of all the Cyclops can, . . . a song of thee.

Sweet apple of my soul, on love's fair tree,

And of myself who love thee . . . till the West

Forgets the light, and all but I have rest.

I feed for thee, besides, eleven fair does,

And all in fawn; and four tame whelps of bears.

Come to me, Sweet! thou shalt have all of those

In change for love! I will not halve the shares.

Leave the blue sea, with pure white arms extended

To the dry shore; and in my cave's recess,

Thou shalt be gladder for the noonlight ended,—

For here be laurels, spiral cypresses, Dark ivy, and a vine whose leaves enfold

Most luscious grapes; and here is water cold,

The wooded Ætna pours down through the trees

From the white snows,—which gods were scarce too bold

To drink in turn with nectar. Who with these

Would choose the salt wave of the lukewarm seas?

Nay, look on me? If I am hairy and rough,

I have an oak's heart in me; there's a fire

In these gray ashes which burns hot enough;

And when I burn for *thee*, I grudge the pyre

No fuel . . . not my soul, nor this one eye,—

Most precious thing I have, because thereby

I see thee, Fairest! Out, alas! I wish My mother had borne me finned like a fish,

That I might plunge down in the ocean near thee,

And kiss thy glittering hand between the weeds,

If still thy face were turned; and I would bear thee

Each lily white, and poppy fair that bleeds

Its red heart down its leaves!—one gift, for hours

Of summer, . . . one, for winter; since, to cheer thee,

I could not bring at once all kinds of flowers.

Even now, girl, now, I fain would learn
to swim,

If stranger in a ship sailed nigh, I
wis,—

That I may know how sweet a thing
it is

To live down with you in the Deep and
Dim!

Come up, O Galatea, from the ocean,
And having come, forget again to go!

As I, who sing out here my heart's
emotion,

Could sit forever. Come up from
below!

Come, keep my flocks beside me, milk
my kine,—

Come, press my cheese, distrain my
whey and curd!

Ah, mother! she alone . . . that mother
of mine . . .

Did wrong me sore! I blame her!—
Not a word

Of kindly intercession did she address
Thine ear with for my sake; and ne'er-
theless

She saw me wasting, wasting, day by
day!

Both head and feet were aching, I
will say,

All sick for grief, as I myself was sick!
O Cyclops, Cyclops, whither hast thou
sent

Thy soul on fluttering wings? If thou
wert bent

On turning bowls, or pulling green and
thick

The sprouts to give thy lambkins,—thou
wouldest make thee

A wiser Cyclops than for what we
take thee.

Milk dry the present! Why pursue too
quick

That future which is fugitive aright?

Thy Galatea thou shalt haply find,—
Or else a maiden fairer and more
kind;

For many girls do call me through the
night,

And, as they call, do laugh out silver-
ly.

I, too, am something in the world, I
see!

While thus the Cyclops love and
lambs did fold,
Ease came with song, he could not buy
with gold.

PARAPHRASES ON APULEIUS.

PSYCHE GAZING ON CUPID.

(*Metamorph.*, Lib. IV.)

THEN Psyche, weak in body and soul,
put on

The cruelty of Fate, in place of
strength:

She raised the lamp to see what should
be done,

And seized the steel, and was a man
at length

In courage, though a woman! Yes, but
when

The light fell on the bed whereby she
stood

To view the '*beast*' that lay there,—
certes, then,

She saw the gentlest, sweetest beast
in wood—

Even Cupid's self, the beauteous god!
more beauteous

For that sweet sleep across his eyelids
dim!

The light, the lady carried as she
viewed,

Did blush for pleasure as it lighted
him,

The dagger trembled from its aim un-
duteous;

And *she* . . . oh, *she*—amazed and soul
distracted,

And fainting in her whiteness like a
veil,

Slid down upon her knees, and, shud-
dering thought

To hide—though in her heart—the dag-
ger pale!

She would have done it, but her hands
did fail

To hold the guilty steel, they shiv-
ered so,—

And feeble, exhausted, unawares she
took

To gazing on the god,—till, look by
look

Her eyes with larger life did fill and
glow.

She saw his golden head alight with
curls,—

She might have guessed their bright-
ness in the dark

By that ambrosial smell of heavenly
mark!

She saw the milky brow, more pure
than pearls,

The purple of the cheeks, divinely
sundered

By the globed ringlets, as they glided
free,

Some back, some forwards,—all so ra-
diantly,

That, as she watched them there, she
never wondered

To see the lamplight, where it touched
them, tremble;

On the god's shoulders, too, she marked
his wings

Shine faintly at the edges and resem-
ble

A flower that's near to blow. The poet
sings

And lover sighs, that Love is fugi-
tive;

And certes, though these pinions lay re-
posing,

The feathers on them seemed to stir
and live

As if by instinct closing and unclosing.

Meantime the god's fair body slum-
bered deep,

All worthy of Venus, in his shining
sleep;

While at the bed's foot lay the quiv-
er, bow,

And darts,—his arms of godhead.
Psyche gazed

With eyes that drank the wonders in,
—said—'Lo,

Be these my husband's arms?'—and
straightway raised

An arrow from the quiver-case, and
tried

Its point against her finger,—trembling
till

She pushed it in too deeply (foolish
bride!)

And made her blood some dewdrops
small distil,

And learnt to love Love, of her own
goodwill.

PSYCHE WAFTED BY ZEPHYRUS.

(*Metamorph.*, Lib. IV.)

WHILE Psyche wept upon the rock for-
saken,

Alone, despairing, dreading,—grad-
ually

By Zephyrus she was enwrapt and ta-
ken

Still trembling,—like the lilies planted
high,—

Through all her fair white limbs. Her
vesture spread,

Her very bosom eddying with sur-
prise,—

He drew her slowly from the mountain-
head,

And bore her down the valleys with
wet eyes,

And laid her in the lap of a green dell
As soft with grass and flowers as any

nest,

With trees beside her, and a limpid
well:

Yet Love was not far off from all that
Rest.

PSYCHE AND PAN.

(*Metamorph.*, Lib. V.)

THE gentle River, in her Cupid's honor,
Because he used to warm the very

wave,

Did ripple aside, instead of closing on
her,

And cast up Psyche, with a reflue
brave,

Upon the flowery bank,—all sad and
sinning.

Then Pan, the rural god, by chance was
leaning

Along the brow of the waters as they
wound,

Kissing the reed-nymph till she sank
to the ground,

And teaching, without knowledge of the meaning,

To run her voice in music after his
Down many a shifting note ; (the goats
around,

In wandering pasture and most leap-
ing bliss,

Drawn on to crop the river's flowery
hair.)

And as the hoary god beheld her there,
The poor, worn, fainting Psyche !—
knowing all

The grief she suffered, he did gently
call

Her name, and softly comfort her des-
pair :—

'O wise, fair lady, I am rough and
rude,

And yet experienced through my weary
age !

And if I read aright, as soothsayer
should,

Thy faltering steps of heavy pilgrim-
age,

Thy paleness, deep as the snow we
cannot see

The roses through,—thy sighs of quick
returning,

Thine eyes that seem, themselves, two
souls in mourning,—

Thou lovest, girl, too well, and bitter-
ly !

But hear me : rush no more to a head-
long fall :

Seek no more deaths ! leave wail, lay
sorrow down,

And pray the sovran god ; and use
withal

Such prayer as best may suit a tender
youth,

Well-pleased to bend to flatteries from
mouth,

And feel them stir the myrtle of his
crown.'

—So spake the shepherd-god ; and
answer none

Gave Psyche in return : but silently
She did him homage with a bended
knee,

And took the onward path.—

PSYCHE PROPITIATING CERES.

(*Metamorph.*, Lib. VI.)

THEN mother Ceres from afar beheld
her,

While Psyche touched, with reverent
fingers meek,

The temple's scythes ; and with a cry
compelled her :

'O wretched Psyche, Venus roams to
seek

Thy wandering footsteps round the
weary earth,

Anxious and maddened, and adjures
thee forth

To accept the imputed pang, and let
her wreak

Full vengeance with full force of deity !
Yet *thou*, forsooth, art in my temple

here,
Touching my scythes, assuming my

degree,
And daring to have thoughts that are

not fear !'
—But Psyche clung to her feet, and as

they moved
Rained tears along their track, tear

dropped on tear,
And drew the dust on in her trailing

locks,
And still, with passionate prayer, the

charge disproved :—
'Now, by thy right hand's gathering

from the shocks
Of golden corn,—and by thy gladsome

rites
Of harvest,—and thy consecrated sights

Shut safe and mute in chests,—and by
the course

Of thy slave-dragons,—and the driving
force

Of ploughs along Sicilian glebes pro-
found,—

By thy swift chariot,—by thy steadfast
ground,—

By all those nuptial torches that departed
With thy lost daughter,—and by those

that shone
Back with her, when she came again

glad-hearted,—
And by all other mysteries which are

done
In silence at Eleusis,—I beseech thee,

O Ceres, take some pity, and abstain
From giving to my soul extremest pain
Who am the wretched Psyche! Let
me teach thee

A little mercy, and have thy leave to
spond

A few days only in thy garnered corn,
Until that wrathful goddess, at the
end,

Shall feel her hate grow mild, the longer
bourne,—

Or till, alas!—this faintness at my breast
Pass from me, and my spirit apprehend
From life-long woe a breath-time hour
of rest!

—But Ceres answered, 'I am moved
indeed

By prayers so moist with tears, and
would defend

The poor beseecher from more utter
need:

But where old oaths, anterior ties,
commend,

I cannot fail to a sister, lie to a friend,
As Venus is to *me*. Depart with speed!

PSYCHE AND THE EAGLE.

(*Metamorph.*, Lib. VI.)

BUT sovran Jove's rapacious bird, the
regal

High percher on the lightning, the great
eagle

Drove down with rushing wings; and,
—thinking how,

By Cupid's help, he bore from Ida's brow
A cup-boy for his master,—he inclined
To yield, in just return, an influence
kind;

The god being honored in his lady's woe.
And thus the bird wheeled downward
from the track,

Gods follow gods in, to the level low
Of that poor face of Psyche left in wrack.

—'Now fie, thou simple girl!' the Bird
began;

'For if thou think to steal and carry back
A drop of holiest stream that ever ran,
No simpler thought, methinks, were
found in man.

What! knowest thou not these Stygian
waters be

Most holy, even to Jove? that as, on
earth,

Men swear by gods, and by the thun-
der's worth,

Even so the heavenly gods do utter forth
Their oaths by Styx's flowing majesty?

And yet, one little urnful, I agree
To grant thy need!' Whereat, all
hastily,

He takes it, fills it from the willing wave,
And bears it in his beak, incarnadined

By the last Titan-prey he screamed to
have;

And, striking calmly out, against the
wind,

Vast wings on each side,—there, where
Psyche stands,

He drops the urn down in her lifted
hands.

PSYCHE AND CERBERUS.

(*Metamorph.*, Lib. VI.)

A MIGHTY Dog with three colossal necks,
And heads in grand proportion; vast
as fear,

With jaws that bark the thunder out
that breaks

In most innocuous dread for ghosts
anear,

Who are safe in death from sorrow: he
reclines

Across the threshold of queen Proser-
pine's

Dark-sweeping halls, and, there, for
Pluto's spouse,

Doth guard the entrance of the empty
house.

When Psyche threw the cake to him,
once amain

He howled up wildly from his hunger-
pain,

And was still, after.—

PSYCHE AND PROSERPINE.

(*Metamorph.*, Lib. VI.)

THEN Psyche entered in to Proserpine
In the dark house, and straightway did
decline

With meek denial the luxurious seat,
The liberal board for welcome stran-
gers spread,

But sate down lowly at the dark queen's
feet,
And told her tale, and brake her oaten
bread.
And when she had given the pyx in
humble duty,
And told how Venus did entreat the
queen
To fill it up with only one day's beauty
She used in Hades, star-bright and
serene,
To beautify the Cyprian, who had been
All spoilt with grief in nursing her
sick boy,—
Then Proserpine, in malice and in joy,
Smiled in the shade, and took the pyx,
and put
A secret in it ; and so, filled and shut,
Gave it again to Psyche. Could she
tell
It held no beauty, but a dream of hell ?

PSYCHE AND VENUS.

(Metamorph., Lib. VI.)

AND Psyche brought to Venus what was
sent
By Pluto's spouse ; the paler, that she
went
So low to seek it, down the dark descent.

MERCURY CARRIES PSYCHE TO OLYMPUS.

(Metamorph., Lib. VI.)

THEN Jove commanded the god Mer-
cury
To float up Psyche from the earth. And
she
Sprang at the first word, as the fountain
springs,
And shot up bright and rustling through
his wings.

MARRIAGE OF PSYCHE AND CUPID.

(Metamorph., Lib. VI.)

AND Jove's right-hand approached the
ambrosial bowl
To Psyche's lips, that scarce dared
yet to smile,—
• Drink, O my daughter, and acquaint
thy soul

With deathless uses, and be glad the
while !
No more shall Cupid leave thy lovely
side ;
Thy marriage-joy begins for never-
ending.'
While yet he spake,—the nuptial feast
supplied,—
The bridegroom on the festive couch
was bending
O'er Psyche in his bosom—Jove, the
same
On Juno, and the other deities,
Alike ranged round. The rural cup-boy
came
And poured Jove's nectar out with
shining eyes,
While Bacchus, for the others, did as
much,
And Vulcan spread the meal ; and all
the Hours,
Made all things purple with a sprinkle
of flowers,
Or roses chiefly, not to say the touch
Of their sweet fingers ; and the
Graces glided
Their balm around, and the Muses,
through the air
Struck out clear voices, which were
still divided
By that divinest song Apollo there
Intoned to his lute ; while Aphrodite
fair
Did float her beauty along the tune, and
play
The notes right with her feet. And
thus, the day
Through every perfect mood of joy was
carried,
The Muses sang their chorus ; Satyrus
Did blow his pipes ; Pan touched his
reed ;—and thus
At last were Cupid and Psyche married.

PARAPHRASES ON NONNUS.

HOW BACCHUS FINDS ARIADNE SLEEPING.

(Dionysiaca, Lib. XLVII.)

WHEN Bacchus first beheld the deso-
late
And sleeping Ariadne, wonder straight

Was mixed with love in his great golden eyes ;
 He turned to his Bacchantes in surprise,
 And said with guarded voice,—‘ Hush !
 strike no more
 Your brazen cymbals ; keep those voices
 still
 Of voice and pipe ; and since ye stand
 before
 Queen Cypris, let her slumber as she
 will !
 And yet the cestus is not here in proof.
 A Grace, perhaps, whom sleep has stolen
 aloof :
 In which case, as morning shines in
 view,
 Wake this Aglaia !—yet in Naxos, who
 Would veil a Grace so ? Hush ! And
 if that she
 Were Hebe, which of all the gods can
 be
 The pourer-out of wine ? or if we think
 She’s like the shining moon by ocean’s
 brink,
 The guide of herds,—why, could she
 sleep without
 Endymion’s breath on her cheek ? or if
 I doubt
 Of silver-footed Thetis, used to tread
 These shores,—even *she* (in reverence
 be it said)
 Has no such rosy beauty to dress deep
 With the blue waves. The Loxian
 goddess might
 Repose so from her hunting-toil aright
 Beside the sea, since toil gives birth to
 sleep,
 But who would find her with her tunic
 loose,
 Thus ? Stand off, Thracian ! stand off !
 Do not leap,
 Not this way ! Leave that piping, since
 I choose,
 O dearest Pan, and let Athene rest !
 And yet if she be Pallas . . truly
 guessed . .
 Her lance is—where ? her helm and ægis
 —where ?
 —As Bacchus closed, the miserable
 Fair
 Awoke at last, sprang upward from the
 sands,
 And gazing wild on that wild throng
 that stands

Around, around her, and no Theseus
 there !—
 Her voice went moaning over shore and
 sea,
 Beside the halcyon’s cry ; she called
 her love ;
 She named her hero, and raged mad-
 deningly
 Against the brine of waters ; and
 above,
 Sought the ship’s track and cursed the
 hours she slept ;
 And still the chiefest execration swept
 Against queen Paphia, mother of the
 ocean ;
 And cursed and prayed by times in her
 emotion
 The winds all round. . . .

 Her grief did make her glorious ; her
 despair
 Adorned her with its weight. Poor
 wailing child !
 She looked like Venus when the goddess
 smiled
 At liberty of godship, debonair ;
 Poor Ariadne ! and her eyelids fair
 Hid looks beneath them lent her by
 Persuasion
 And every Grace, with tears of Love’s
 own passion.
 She wept long ; then she spake :—
 ‘ Sweet sleep did come
 While sweetest Theseus went. O, glad
 and dumb,
 I wish he had left me still ! for in my
 sleep
 I saw his Athens, and did gladly keep
 My new bride-state within my Theseus’
 hall ;
 And heard the pomp of Hymen, and
 the call
 Of ‘ Ariadne, Ariadne,’ sung
 In choral joy ; and there, with joy I
 hung
 Spring-blossoms round love’s altar !—ay,
 and wore
 A wreath myself ; and felt *him* ever-
 more,
 Oh, evermore beside me, with his
 mighty
 Grave head bowed down in prayer to
 Aphrodite !

Why, what sweet, sweet dream! *He*
 went with it,
 And left me here unwedded where I
 sit!
 Persuasion help me! The dark night
 did make me
 A brideship, the fair morning takes
 away;
 My Love had left me when the Hour did
 wake me;
 And while I dreamed of marriage, as
 I say,
 And blest it well, my blessed Theseus
 left me:
 And thus the sleep, I loved so, has be-
 reft me.
 Speak to me, rocks, and tell my grief
 to-day,
 Who stole my love of Athens?' . . .

HOW BACCHUS COMFORTS ARIADNE.

(*Dionysiaca*, Lib. XLVII.)

THEN Bacchus' subtle speech her sorrow
 crossed:—
 'O maiden, dost thou mourn for having
 lost
 The false Athenian heart? and dost thou
 still
 Take thought of Theseus, when thou
 may'st at will
 Have Bacchus for a husband? Bacchus
 bright
 A god in place of mortal! Yes, and
 though
 The mortal youth be charming in thy
 sight,
 That man of Athens cannot strive be-
 low,
 In beauty and valor, with my deity!
 Thou'lt tell me of the labyrinthine
 dweller,
 The fierce man-bull, he slew: I pray
 thee, be,
 Fair Ariadne, the true deed's true
 teller,
 And mention thy clue's help! because,
 forsooth,
 Thine armed Athenian hero had not
 found
 A power to fight on that prodigious
 ground,
 Unless a lady in her rosy youth

Had lingered near him: not to speak
 the truth
 Too definitely out till names be known—
 Like Paphia's—Love's—and Ariadne's
 own.
 Thou wilt not say that Athens can com-
 pare
 With Æther, nor that Minos rules like
 Zeus,
 Nor yet that Gnosus has such golden
 air
 As high Olympus. Ha! for noble use
 We came to Naxos! Love has well in-
 tended
 To change thy bridegroom! Happy
 thou, defended
 From entering in thy Theseus' earthly
 hall,
 That thou mayst hear the laughters rise
 and fall
 Instead, where Bacchus rules! Or wilt
 thou choose
 A still-surpassing glory?—take it all,—
 A heavenly house, Kronion's self for
 kin,—
 A place where Cassiopea sits within
 Inferior light, for all her daughter's
 sake,
 Since Perseus, even amid the stars, must
 take
 Andromeda in chains ætherial!
 But *I* will wreathe *thee*, sweet, an astral
 crown,
 And as my queen and spouse thou shalt
 be known—
 Mine, the crown-lover's! Thus, at
 length, he proved
 His comfort on her; and the maid was
 moved;
 And casting Theseus' memory down the
 brine,
 She straight received the troth of her
 divine
 Fair Bacchus; Love stood by to close
 the rite:
 The marriage-chorus struck up clear and
 light,
 Flowers sprouted fast about the chamber
 green,
 And with spring-garlands on their
 heads, I ween,
 The Orchomenian dancers came along,
 And danced their rounds in Naxos to
 the song.

A Hamadryad sang a nuptial dit
 Right shrilly : and a Naiad sate beside
 A fountain, with her bare foot shelving it,
 And hymned of Ariadne, beauteous
 bride,
 Whom thus the god of grapes had deified.
 Ortygia sang out, louder than her wont,
 An ode which Phæbus gave her to be
 tried,
 And leapt in chorus, with her steadfast
 front,
 While prophet Love, the stars have
 called a brother,
 Burnt in his crown, and twined in one
 another,
 His love-flower with the purple roses,
 given
 In type of that new crown assigned in
 heaven.

PARAPHRASE ON HESIOD.

BACCHUS AND ARIADNE.

(*Theog.*, 947.)

THE golden-haired Bacchus did espouse
 That fairest Ariadne, Minos' daughter,
 And made her wifehood blossom in the
 house ;
 Where such protective gifts Kronion
 brought her,
 Nor Death nor Age could find her
 when they sought her.

PARAPHRASE ON EURIPIDES.

ANTISTROPHE.

(*Troades*, 853.)

LOVE, Love who once didst pass the
 Dardan portals,
 Because of Heavenly passion !
 Who once didst lift up Troy in exulta-
 tion,
 To mingle in thy bond the high Immor-
 tals !—
 Love, turned from his own name

To Zeus' shame,
 Can help no more a...
 And Eos' self, the fair, white-steeded
 morning,—
 Her light which blesses other lands, re-
 turning,
 Has changed to a gloomy pall !
 She looked across the land with eyes of
 amber,—
 She saw the city's fall,—
 She, who, in pure embraces,
 Had held there, in the hymeneal cham-
 ber,
 Her children's father, bright Tithonus
 old,
 Whom the four steeds with starry brows
 and paces
 Bore on, snatched upward, on the car of
 gold,
 And with him, all the land's full hope of
 joy !
 The love-charms of the gods are vain
 for Troy.

NOTE.—Rendered after Mr. Burges's reading,
 in some respects—not quite all.

PARAPHRASES ON HOMER.

HECTOR AND ANDROMACHE.

(*Iliad*, Lib. VI.)

SHE rushed to meet him : the nurse fol-
 lowing
 Bore on her bosom the unsaddened
 child,
 A simple babe, prince Hector's well-
 loved son,
 Like a star shining when the world is
 dark.
 Scamandrius, Hector called him, but the
 rest
 Named him Astyanax, the city's prince,
 Because that Hector only, had saved
 Troy.
 He, when he saw his son, smiled silently ;
 While, dropping tears, Andromache
 pressed on,
 And clung to his hand, and spake, and
 named his name.

'Hector, my best one,—thine own noble-
 ness

Must needs undo thee. Pity hast thou
 none
 For this young child, and this most sad
 myself,
 Who soon shall be thy widow—since
 that soon
 The Greeks will slay thee in the general
 rush—
 And then, for me, what refuge, rest of
thee,
 But to go graveward? Then, no com-
 fort more
 Shall touch me, as in the old sad times
 thou know'st—
 Grief only—grief! I have no father
 now,
 No mother mild! Achilles the divine.
He slew my father, sacked his lofty
 Thebes,
 Cilicia's populous city, and slew its king,
 Eëtion—father, did not spoil the corse,
 Because the Greek revered him in his
 soul,
 But burnt the body with its dædal arms,
 And poured the dust out gently. Round
 that tomb
 The Oreads, daughters of the goat-
 nursed Zeus,
 Tripped in a ring, and planted their
 green elms.
 There were seven brothers with me in
 the house,
 Who all went down to Hades in one
 day,—
 For *he* slew all, Achilles the divine,
 Famed for his swift feet,—slain among
 their herds
 Of cloven-footed bulls and flocking
 sheep!
 My mother too, who queened it o'er the
 woods
 Of Hippoplacia, he, with other spoil,
 Seized,—and, for golden ransom, freed
 too late,—
 Since, as she went home, arrowy Ar-
 temis
 Met her and slew her at my father's
 door.
 But—oh, my Hector,—thou art still to
 me
 Father and mother!—yes, and brother
 dear,
 O thou, who art my sweetest spouse
 beside!

Come now, and take me into pity!
 Stay
 I' the town here with us! Do not make
 thy child
 An orphan, nor a widow, thy poor wife!
 Call up the people to the fig-tree, where
 The city is most accessible, the wall
 Most easy of assault!—for thrice there-
 by
 The boldest Greeks have mounted to
 the breach,—
 Both Ajaxes, the famed Idomenus
 Two sons of Atreus, and the noble one
 Of Tydeus,—whether taught by some
 wise seer,
 Or by their own souls prompted and
 inspired.'

Great Hector answered:—'Lady, for
 these things
 It is my part to care, And I fear most
 My Trojans, and their daughters, and
 their wives,
 Who through their long veils would
 glance scorn at me,
 If, coward-like, I shunned the open war.
 Nor doth my own soul prompt me to
 that end!
 I learnt to be a brave man constantly,
 And to fight foremost where my Trojans
 fight,
 And vindicate my father's glory and
 mine—
 Because I know, by instinct and my
 soul,
 The day comes that our sacred Troy
 must fall,
 And Priam and his people. Knowing
 which,
 I have no such grief for all my Trojan's
 sake,
 For Hecuba's, for Priam's, our old king,
 Not for my brothers', who so many and
 brave
 Shall bite the dust before our enemies,—
 As, sweet, for *thee*!—to think some
 mailed Greek
 Shall lead thee weeping and deprive thy
 life
 Of the free sun-sight—that, when gone
 away
 To Argos, thou shalt throw the distaff
 there
 Not for thy uses—or shalt carry instead

Upon thy loathing brow, as heavy a
 doom,
 The water of Greek wells—Messeis'
 own,
 Or Hyperea's!—that some stander-by,
 Marking thy tears fall, shall say, 'This
 is she,
 The wife of that same Hector who
 fought best
 Of all the Trojans, when all fought for
 Troy—'
 Ay!—and, so speaking, shall renew thy
 pang
 That, reft of him so named, thou shouldst
 survive
 To a slave's life! But earth shall hide
 my corse
 Ere that shriek sound, wherewith thou
 art dragged from Troy.'
 Thus Hector spake, and stretched his
 arms to his child.
 Against the nurse's breast, with childly
 cry,
 The boy clung back, and shunned his
 father's face,
 And feared the glittering brass and
 waving hair
 Of the high helmet, nodding horror
 down.
 The father smiled, the mother could not
 choose
 But smile too. Then he lifted from his
 brow
 The helm, and set it on the ground to
 shine :
 Then, kissed his dear child—raised him
 with both arms,
 And thus invoked Zeus and the general
 gods :—
 ' Zeus, and all godships! grant this boy
 of mine
 To be the Trojans' help, as I myself,—
 To live a brave life and rule well in
 Troy!
 Till men shall say, 'The son exceeds
 the sire
 By a far glory.' Let him bring home
 spoil
 Heroic, and make glad his mother's
 heart.'
 With which prayer, to his wife's ex-
 tended arms

He gave the child; and she received
 him straight
 To her bosom's fragrance—smiling up
 her tears.
 Hector gazed on her till his soul was
 moved ;
 Then softly touched her with his hand
 and spake.
 ' My best one—'ware of passion and
 excess
 In any fear. There's no man in the
 world
 Can send me to the grave apart from
 fate,—
 And no man . . Sweet, I tell thee . .
 can fly fate—
 No good nor bad man. Doom is self-
 fulfilled.
 But now, go home, and ply thy woman's
 task
 Of wheel and distaff! bid thy maidens
 haste
 Their occupation. War's a care for
 men—
 For all men born in Troy, and chief for
 me.'
 Thus spake the noble Hector, and re-
 sumed
 His crested helmet, while his spouse
 went home ;
 But as she went, still looked back
 lovingly,
 Dropping the tears from her reverted
 face.

THE DAUGHTERS OF PANDARUS.

(*Odys.*, Lib. XX.)

AND so these daughters fair of Pandarus,
 The whirlwinds took. The gods had
 slain their kin ;
 They were left orphans in their father's
 house.
 And Aphrodite came to comfort them
 With incense, luscious honey, and fra-
 grant wine ;
 And Here gave them beauty of face and
 soul
 Beyond all women ; purest Artemis
 Endowed them with her stature and
 white grace ;
 And Pallas taught their hands to flash
 along

Her famous looms. Then, bright with deity,
 Toward far Olympus, Aphrodite went
 To ask of Zeus (who has his thunder-joys
 And his full knowledge of man's mingled fate)
 How best to crown those other gifts with love
 And worthy marriage: but, what time she went,
 The ravishing Harpies snatched the maids away,
 And gave them up, for all their loving eyes,
 To serve the Furies who hate constantly.

ANOTHER VERSION.

So the storms bore the daughters of Pandarus out into thrall—
 The gods slew their parents; the orphans were left in the hall.
 And there came, to feed their young lives, Aphrodite divine,
 With the incense, the sweet-tasting honey, the sweet-smelling wine;
 Here brought them her wit above woman's, and beauty of face;
 And pure Artemis gave them her stature, that form might have grace:
 And Athene instructed their hands in her works of renown;
 Then, afar to Olympus, divine Aphrodite moved on:
 To complete other gifts, by uniting each girl to a mate,
 She sought Zeus, who has joy in the thunder and knowledge of fate,
 Whether mortals have good chance or ill! But the Harpies alate
 In the storm came, and swept off the maidens, and gave them to wait,
 With that love in their eyes, on the Furies who constantly hate.

PARAPHRASE ON ANACREON.

ODE TO THE SWALLOW.

THOU indeed, little Swallow,
 A sweet yearly comer,
 Art building a hollow
 New nest every summer,

And straight dost depart
 Where no gazing can follow,
 Past Memphis, down Nile!
 Ay! but love all the while
 Builds his nest in my heart,
 Through the cold winter-weeks:
 And as one Love takes flight,
 Comes another, O Swallow,
 In an egg warm and white,
 And another is callow.
 And the large gaping beaks
 Chirp all day and all night:
 And the Loves who are older
 Help the young and the poor Loves,
 And the young Loves grown bolder
 Increase by the score Loves—
 Why, what can be done?
 If a noise comes from one,
 Can I bear all this rout of a hundred
 and more Loves?

SONG OF THE ROSE.

ATTRIBUTED TO SAPPHO.

If Zeus chose us a King of the flowers
 in his mirth,
 He would call to the rose, and would
 royally crown it;
 For the rose, ho, the rose! is the grace
 of the earth,
 Is the light of the plants that are
 growing upon it!
 For the rose, ho, the rose! is the eye of
 the flowers,
 Is the blush of the meadows that feel
 themselves fair,—
 Is the lightning of beauty that strikes
 through the bowers
 On pale lovers that sit in the glow un-
 aware.
 Ho, the rose breathes of love! ho, the
 rose lifts the cup
 To the red lips of Cypris invoked for
 a guest!
 Ho, the rose having curled its sweet
 leaves for the world
 Takes delight in the motion its petals
 keep up,
 As they laugh to the Wind as it laughs
 from the west.

From Achilles Tatius.

THE FOURFOLD ASPECT.

When ye stood up in the house
 With your little childish feet,
 And in touching Life's first shows,
 First the touch of Love did meet,—
 Love and Nearness seeming one,
 By the heart-light cast before,
 And, of all Beloveds, none
 Standing farther than the door—
 Not a name being dear to thought,
 With its owner beyond call,
 Nor a face, unless it brought
 Its own shadow to the wall,
 When the worst recorded change
 Was of apple dropt from bough,
 When love's sorrow seemed more
 strange
 Than love's treason can seem now;
 Then, the Loving took you up
 Soft, upon their elder knees,—
 Telling why the statues droop
 Underneath the churchyard trees,
 And how *ye* must lie beneath them
 Through the winters long and deep,
 Till the last trump overbreathe them,
 And ye smile out of your sleep . . .
 Oh ye lifted up your head, and it seemed
 as if they said
 A tale of fairy ships
 With a swan-wing for a sail!—
 Oh, ye kissed their loving lips
 For the merry, merry tale!—
 So carelessly ye thought upon the Dead.

Soon ye read in solemn stories
 Of the men of long ago—
 Of the pale bewildering glories
 Shining farther than we know.
 Of the heroes with the laurel,
 Of the poets with the bay,
 Of the two worlds' earnest quarrel
 For that beauteous Helena.
 How Achilles at the portal
 Of the tent, heard footsteps nigh
 And his strong heart, half-immortal,
 Met the *keitai* with a cry,—
 How Ulysses left the sunlight
 For the pale eidola race
 Blank and passive through the dun
 light,
 Staring blindly on his face;

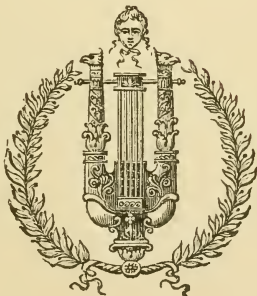
How that true wife said to Pætus,
 With calm smile and wounded
 heart,
 'Sweet, it hurts not!'—how Admetus
 Saw his blessed one depart.
 How King Arthur proved his mission,
 And Sir Rowland wound his horn,
 And at Sangreal's moony vision
 Swords did bristle round like corn.
 Oh! ye lifted up your head, and it
 seemed the while ye read,
 That this death, then, must be found
 A Valhalla for the crowned—
 The heroic who prevail.
 None, be sure can enter in
 Far below a paladin
 Of a noble, noble tale!—
 So awfully ye thought upon the Dead.

Ay! but soon ye woke up shrieking,—
 As a child that wakes at night
 From a dream of sisters speaking
 In a garden's summer-light,—
 That wakes, starting up and bounding,
 In a lonely, lonely bed,
 With a wall of darkness round him,
 Stifling black about his head!—
 And the full sense of your mortal
 Rushed upon you deep and loud,
 And ye heard the thunder hurtle
 From the silence of the cloud—
 Funeral-torches at your gateway
 Threw a dreadful light within;
 All things changed! you rose up
 straightway
 And saluted Death and Sin.
Since,—your outward man has rallied
 And your eye and voice grown
 bold—
 Yet the Sphinx of Life stands pallid,
 With her saddest secret told.
 Happy places have grown holy:
 If ye went where once ye went,
 Only tears would fall down slowly,
 As at solemn sacrament:
 Merry books, once read for pastime,
 If ye dared to read again,
 Only memories of the last time
 Would swim darkly up the brain.
 Household *names*, which used to
 flutter
 Through your laughter unawares,—

God's Divinest ye could utter
 With less trembling in your prayers !
 Ye have dropt adown your head, and it
 seems as if ye tread
 On your own hearts in the path
 Ye are called to in His wrath,—
 And your prayers go up in wail !
 —'Dost Thou see, then, all our loss,
 O Thou agonized on cross ?
 Art Thou reading all its tale ?
 So, mournfully ye think upon the Dead

Pray, pray, *thou* who also weepst,
 And the drops will slacken so ;
 Weep, weep :—and the watch thou
 keepest,
 With a quicker count will go.
 Think :—the shadow on the dial
 For the nature most undone,
 Marks the passing of the trial,
 Proves the presence of the sun :
 Look, look up, in starry passion,
 To the throne above the spheres,—

Learn : the spirit's gravitation
 Still must differ from the tear's.
 Hope : with all the strength thou
 usest
 In embracing thy despair :
 Love : the earthly love thou lovest
 Shall return to thee more fair.
 Work : make clear the forest-tangles
 Of the wildest stranger-land :
 Trust : the blessed deathly angels
 Whisper, ' Sabbath hours at hand !'
 By the heart's wound when most gory
 By the longest agony,
 Smile !—Behold, in sudden glory
 The TRANSFIGURED smiles on *thee* !
 And ye lifted up your head, and it
 seemed as if He said,
 ' My Beloved, is it so ?
 Have ye tasted of my wo ?
 Of my heaven ye shall not fail !'—
 He stands brightly where the shade is,
 With the keys of Death and Hades,
 And there ends the mournful tale :—
 So hopefully ye think upon the Dead.



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